

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Committee for Official Statistics

Minutes

Monday 13 October 2008

Present

Members

Sir Michael Scholar (Chair)
Mr Richard Alldritt
Ms Karen Dunnell
Ms Moira Gibb
Ms Jil Matheson
Professor David Rhind
Professor Paul Wiles

Other Attendees

Mr James Denman (for item 9)
Mr Mike Hughes

Secretariat

Mr Rob Bumpstead
Mr Ross Young

Apologies

None

Declarations of Interest

None

1. Introduction, Minutes and Matters Arising

1.1 Given the vacancy in the position of the Authority's Deputy Chair (Statistical System), Sir Michael Scholar took the Chair.

1.2 The minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 22 July were agreed as a true and accurate record.

1.3 There were several matters arising:

- the Inter-Administration Committee would next meet in the week beginning 20 October while the reformation of Theme Working Groups into Thematic Planning Groups would be further discussed at the November meeting of statistical Heads of Profession (HoPs) (action 2);
- Mr Hughes and the Secretariat would establish progress in the development and provision of technical advice on a taxonomy for the Publication Hub and would circulate information as necessary (action 8);
- production of the National Statistics Work Programme in hard copy had been discontinued (action 9).

2 Report from the Head of the Government Statistical Service (GSS)

2.1 Ms Dunnell provided an oral report in her capacity as Head of the GSS.

2.2 The Committee noted that the Heads of Analytic Professions had met twice since the last meeting of the Committee, and the group had made progress with respect to data linkage, in particular a commitment to establish better arrangements for the more effective linkage of data records within virtual systems. Office for National Statistics (ONS) would lead a pilot and 'proof of concept' project, drawing on expertise gained in ONS's population statistics work. In light of this, it was agreed that the Committee would have an opportunity to consider next steps when this was appropriate.

2.3 Since the last meeting of the Committee Ms Dunnell had held various Ministerial meetings, in particular with respect to the award of the Census contract, and, as part of the Inter-Ministerial Group on Migration Statistics. The Committee noted relevant changes to ministerial portfolios following the Prime Minister's recent announcement. Other recent engagements were noted, including discussions with the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit, meetings of the Foresight group convened by the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills, and visits accompanying the Authority Chair to HM Revenue and Customs and the Information Centre for Health and Social Care. Publication of the National Statistician's article on measuring the economy and her attendance at a recent meeting of the Financial and Economic Statistics User Group was also noted.

2.4 Ms. Dunnell provided further information on GSS developments, including the first meeting of the Statistical Policy and Standards Committee, chaired by Ms. Matheson. The Committee also noted the ongoing development of an ONS stakeholder engagement strategy which it was anticipated could be extended across the wider GSS; initiatives to improve the explanation of statistical information; international engagements and liaison; the drafting of guidance to assist producers in implementation of the Authority's (draft) Code of Practice; and the further development of the Publication Hub and a web strategy.

3 Report from the Head of Assessment

3.1 Mr. Alldritt provided an oral report in his capacity as Head of Assessment.

- 3.2 The Committee noted progress on reports on the Consultation on the Code of Practice, and a report on official statistics not currently designated as National Statistics. It was anticipated that both reports would be published early in 2009. Work was also advanced on developing an initial programme for Assessment and Designation, and a Monitoring report about progress in improving migration statistics.
- 3.3 The Monitoring and Assessment team had recently published a note regarding the volatility of the Retail Sales Index. This was intended to be the first of a series of such notes. The next note might consider how statisticians had addressed the issue of improving comparability of hospital waiting list statistics produced by the UK government and the devolved administrations. This could be held up as a model of best practice.
- 3.4 The Committee considered the next proposed Assessment and Monitoring note and agreed that a draft would be circulated both to members of the Committee for Official Statistics (COS) and the Authority. It was noted that there were parallel issues in other fields, for example, schools, social services and crime. The Committee understood that the note was intended to be an exemplar of best practice at the level of principle, rather than being the last word on the specific details of the particular issue.
- 3.5 It was also noted that this issue underlined the utility of UK wide household surveys in providing comparable national outputs, where there were inconsistencies in administrative data because of difference in administrative systems or policy.
- 3.6 The Committee further considered the nature of Monitoring notes and the following points were made in discussion:
- the notes added value in providing a medium to swiftly address issues of public concern or interest, without the necessity for the much longer production time of Monitoring reports;
 - it was important that the notes continued to be given sufficient time for review by Authority and Committee members as appropriate to each issue. The note about Retail Sales had benefited significantly from such review;
 - the audience that each note was intended to address should be carefully considered. This could include users, both expert and novice, the general public, producers within the GSS or elsewhere, and particularly parliamentarians given the Authority's ultimate duty to report to the legislatures of the UK.
- 3.7 The meeting also noted a range of engagement initiatives the Authority secretariat was involved in facilitating including the parliamentary stakeholder event (November 11), Statistics User Forum conference (November 12), ongoing discussions with the Bank of England regarding the treatment of Bank statistics in respect to the Code, and engagement with the Devolved Administrations and the setting up of the Authority's office in Edinburgh.

4 Identifying and Responding to the User Voice SA(COS)(08)05

- 4.1 Mr Alldritt presented a paper which argued that the Authority should promote a change in the priorities of statistical producers towards both identifying user needs and demonstrating responsiveness to those needs. It proposed that a Monitoring Report be prepared on this topic, seeking in particular to gather together evidence of responsiveness to users across the GSS and practical ideas on how to make the user voice more audible.
- 4.2 The Committee recognised the difficulty inherent in finding out what the multitude of

users of statistics want and need; but that documentation of these needs was essential if the Authority were to publicly justify current activities and priorities and also to plan effectively for the future. There was no simple solution. Instead, progress was likely to involve a series of separate steps.

- 4.3 The meeting considered distinct aspects to user engagement, in particular the need to document accurately the different uses of statistics, to evaluate the effectiveness of engagement between producers and users of statistics, and the effectiveness of processes for deciding between the priorities of the various *users* and *uses* of statistical products.
- 4.4 The Committee also discussed the importance of a comprehensive and effective Authority user engagement programme, and how it might relate to ONS activity in this area. It would be useful to review recent user engagement exercises, particularly the steps taken in relation to the 2011 Census.
- 4.5 The merits of various engagement strategies and associated funding questions were also reviewed. In summary, the Committee:
 - i. recognised the difficulty in identifying the full range of users beyond those already represented by organised user groups;
 - ii. considered that focussing on identifying the *uses* made of statistics was an approach which could prove fruitful, and would provide essential information to inform Government decisions about allocation of resources for statistical production;
 - iii. acknowledged the public sector resource environment was tight and was likely to remain so over the period of the current and next spending review periods. There was therefore a limit to what might be achieved in terms of gaining resource for statistical work, but the evidence of user need would be important whether or not there was additional resource available;
 - iv. agreed that identifying user needs and strengthening the user voice was a complex, long-term and challenging objective. It was important that the Monitoring Report set realistic ambitions and a clear timetable for delivery;
 - v. noted that there was a reasonable expectation among users that the Statistics Authority would champion their needs and be seen to take actions to strengthen the user voice.
- 4.6 In the context of this discussion the Committee agreed to recommend to the Board of the Authority that the Monitoring Report be commissioned. It was also agreed that the paper should be submitted for further discussion at the meeting of the Authority on 23 October.
- 4.8 The case for greater Authority involvement in the funding of the Statistics User Forum (SUF), including support for SUF through secondments and the sponsorship of events, was also considered.
- 4.9 The Committee reviewed the current funding arrangement for SUF, noting that funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) would cease during 2009. The position of the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) when compared with other learned societies, such as the Royal Society and British Academy, appeared relatively unfavourable in terms of attracting government funding and the extent of routine engagement with government departments and policy-makers.

- 4.10 It was agreed that the question of funding administrative support for the SUF might be considered further as part of the work of the Monitoring Report and would require further dialogue with ESRC and the RSS.

5 Leadership and Revitalisation of the GSS [Revised] SA(COS)(08)06

- 5.1 Mr. Hughes introduced a revised paper, further to the Committee's discussion on 22 July, which set out the vision, objectives, and priorities of the Head of GSS. The Committee noted formal project management arrangements had been set up to deliver in this area lead by Ms Walker, the responsible ONS Deputy Director. It was intended to present the paper at the November meeting of HoPs.

- 5.2 The Committee endorsed the paper subject to the following amendments being made to Annex B:

- *The professional statistical community.* The following text would be incorporated under 'What Success Will Look Like' - "encourage statisticians to explain and present statistical messages in public". This point was made with particular reference to the Authority's Publication Hub press conferences;
- *Use of statistics in decision making.* Under the heading 'barriers', point 5, reference to be made to a proposed amendment to the UK Ministerial Code to the effect that Ministers should have regard to the provisions of the Statistics Act, the Code of Practice and the underlying principles regarding statistical propriety;
- *International.* The Committee agreed that under 'What Success Will Look Like', point 7, which emphasised the desirability for a strong international reputation, should be the primary point in this section. Point 1, which specified membership of various international organisations, should make a distinction between those committees which the ONS was included on by default as the UK's National Statistical Institute and those committees on which its membership was earned by reputation.

6 UK Statistical System [Revised] SA(COS)(08)07

- 6.1 Mr Hughes introduced a revised paper, further to the Committee's discussion on 22 July, which described the essential features of the UK statistical system and highlighted those aspects of the system that may be of most interest to the work of the Committee. The Committee welcomed the paper and confirmed it should be tabled for the next Authority meeting.

- 6.2 It was further suggested that material from the paper could usefully be incorporated in the Authority's Annual Report.

- 6.3 The meeting discussed the table at Annex A(i) which showed the number of GSS staff and statistical products for each Department. These figures needed careful interpretation. The denotation 'products' did not imply products of equal size, hence per capita calculations of statistical products produced per statistician employed would

be misleading.

- 6.4 It was also noted that the information provided could facilitate a broad estimate of the expenditure on statistical production in each government department using estimated employment costs of statisticians against numbers of statisticians employed. However, this would exclude non-staff costs, for example, survey costs.

7 A Second Official Statistics Order SA(COS)(08)08

- 7.1 Mr Bumpstead presented a paper which included a submission from the Cabinet Office to the Authority regarding a second Official Statistics Order, specifying additional non-Crown bodies that could produce official statistics under the terms of the Statistics Act. The Committee understood that the order was in practice likely to take the form of an amendment to the first Official Statistics Order. It was anticipated that the amended Order would be laid before Parliament before the end of 2008.
- 7.2 The Committee noted the systematic approach that had been taken to the work and the criteria that had been adopted to determine whether or not a body should be included as a producer of official statistics. The result was that about 30 more public bodies would be added to the list of official statistics producers while about 8 would be removed. A further list of over 700 bodies that had been considered to be beyond the scope of the Order had been compiled and could be provided by the Secretariat on request.
- 7.3 The meeting understood that separate arrangements applied for wholly Scottish statistics and that a separate Order had been laid before the Scottish Parliament in spring 2008.
- 7.4 The Committee also received an oral update on discussions between the Authority's staff and the Bank of England regarding the treatment of Bank statistics under the provisions of the Act and accompanying secondary legislation.
- 7.5 The position of other specific bodies was considered including the BBC, the Civil Aviation Authority, British Airports Authority, the Prisons Inspectorate and the National Audit Office. Pending clarification of these issues the Committee agreed they were content for the Order to proceed as set out. The Committee also noted that the expansion in the number of products deemed to be official statistics could stretch the resources available to HoPs and the Authority itself. It would be important to maintain an appropriate focus and set of priorities.

8 A New System for Statistical Planning SA(COS)(08)09

- 8.1 Ms. Dunnell introduced a paper which provided an overview of proposed new planning arrangements for the UK statistical service. The Committee understood that these proposals were due to be further considered at the next meeting of statistical Heads of Profession (HoPs) in November.
- 8.2 The Committee noted the need for a new framework for statistical planning, including the need for consultation, identification of priorities and omissions, the importance of a framework reconciling omissions with stated priorities, and the need to strengthen arrangements for planning across Government and in the longer-term.
- 8.3 The meeting heard that the new arrangements involved the creation of a top-level Work Planning Committee (WPC) which would direct, and be informed by, the work

of a series of new Planning Groups. These groups would replace the existing Theme Working Groups. The WPC would in turn feed into the work of the COS, acting as a conduit for producers to communicate concerns with the Authority.

8.4 In discussion, the need for statistical planning to be linked with the planning arrangements of the other Heads of Analytic Profession was emphasised, together with the importance of input into the planning for the next Comprehensive Spending Review.

8.5 The Committee also noted the proposed 'National Statistician's Statistics Plan' (NSSP) and agreed that reference to an additional 'Statistics Authority Annual *Plan*' in the paper might not convey the Authority's intentions clearly and should be removed. The Authority would offer strategic guidance, the results of specific work into particular topics or the output of its horizon scanning activities. These could take the form of Assessment and Monitoring Reports, its Annual Report(s) to Parliament(s), its own work programme or other outputs - but this should not be compared with the NSSP. Rather than replicate such a plan the Authority would provide a guidance and challenge function to it.

9 Identifying Official Statistics SA(COS)(08)10

9.1 Mr Denman introduced a paper about the definition of 'statistics' in the context of 'official statistics' under the terms of Statistics Act. A set of criteria had been drafted to help HoPs determine which products might and might not be considered statistics. Comment was invited on the proposals.

9.2 The Committee considered that the criteria presented did not represent a definitive taxonomy and should not be considered as such. The Statistics Act provided for a degree of flexibility in the interpretation of the definition of statistics and this was not necessarily unhelpful.

9.3 In practice it would be for HoPs in each department to determine the status of products. Where it was not possible to reach local agreement, for example on whether a product was research or statistics, the matter could be referred to the leaders of those professions.

9.4 However, the Committee agreed that the paper provided a useful set of working guidelines for HoPs to refer to when addressing these issues.

9.5 The Committee suggested that the paper could be further improved by:

- including illustrative examples of how the guidelines might be applied in practice;
- redrafting section 2 of the proposed criteria, '*Content/Purpose*' [contained in Annex A to the paper], to reflect a better balance between the needs of users outside of government as well as users within government.

10 Any Other Business

10.1 There was no other business. The date of the next meeting is 13 January 2009.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Committee for Official Statistics

Agenda

Monday, 13 October, 2008

Room GM3 'Kew', Statistics House, London, 13:00 - 15:00

Chair: Sir Michael Scholar

Apologies:

1	Apologies, Minutes and Matters arising	Meeting of 220708
2	Report from the Head of the GSS	Oral Report Ms Karen Dunnell
3	Report from the Head of Assessment	Oral Report Mr Richard Alldritt
4	Identifying and Responding to The User Voice	COS(08)05 Mr Richard Alldritt
5	Leadership of the GSS [Revised]	COS(08)06 Ms Karen Dunnell
6	The UK Statistical System [Revised]	COS(08)07 Mr Mike Hughes
7	A Second Official Statistics Order	COS(08)08 Mr Rob Bumpstead
8	A New System for Statistical Planning	COS(08)09 Ms Karen Dunnell
9	Defining Official Statistics	COS(08)10 Mr Mike Hughes
10	Any other business	

Next Meeting: Tuesday, 13 January 2009

Statistics House, London, 10.30am - 12.30pm

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

SA(COS)(08)05

Identifying and Responding to the User Voice

Purpose

1. This paper argues that the Committee for Official Statistics (COS) should promote a real change in the priorities of all producers of official statistics towards both identifying user needs and publicly demonstrating responsiveness to those needs.

Timing

2. While the issue of user engagement is a long term one, it would be desirable for the Authority to be able to report on early initiatives in this area when it publishes its first annual report to Parliament. That suggests that specific steps should be agreed by the end of 2008 and taken by March 2009.

Recommendation

3. The Committee is invited to:
 - recommend that the Head of Assessment is invited to specify a Monitoring Review on the topic of “Strengthening the user voice”, based on the considerations at paragraph 11 below, and;
 - seek approval from the Authority for a specification of such a review.

Discussion

4. A paper for the July meeting of the Committee, *Meeting Users' Needs* [SA(COS)(08)04], argued that the Committee should approach much of its remit from the perspective of the user of statistics. It raised the question of whether sufficient work is being invested across the statistical service in understanding the use made of statistics and the related needs of users.
5. There are three key arguments as to why an initiative should be taken:
 - i. Users feel that their voice is not currently being heard sufficiently clearly - this may have serious consequences for funding, planning, delivery and securing public value.
 - ii. There is no single, simple solution. It is more realistic to think in terms of a large number of initiatives, some of which may already be in hand but are not sufficient in themselves. The aim would be to achieve a substantive improvement in engagement between producers of statistics and users, particularly users outside government, as it is their needs which so often seem difficult to ascertain with confidence and are therefore hard to factor in to planning and funding discussions.
 - iii. The process of improving engagement must be seen as iterative and self-reinforcing. Statistical producers need to be able to publicly demonstrate that they are responding to the views and priorities that are being expressed by users. Without that, it is unlikely that users will see much value in devoting efforts to engaging with producers. Conversely if such a demonstration of responsiveness *is* recognised publicly this would in turn help users to publicly support producers.
6. The first argument above is a view widely shared by users and other commentators but it is not clear that many producers of statistics necessarily share it. Some of the statistical offices in government departments are very focused on their internal departmental users – who are well placed to make sure that the statisticians retain that focus. There is thus a need to raise awareness that responding to the needs of external bodies – such as local

authorities, business, the voluntary sector and the general public – offers great potential benefits both in terms of the public good and in providing incontrovertible evidence of the value of the statistical product.

7. One step that is being taken here is to recast parts of the draft Code of Practice to bring together and emphasise the requirements relating to user engagement. This suggestion emerged from discussions with the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) and Statistics Users Forum (SUF). The Code of Practice can be seen as the manifesto of the Authority and will help to send a clear message, particularly if the Assessment function is tailored to reinforce that message. But this on its own may not win the hearts and minds of government statisticians.
8. Some producers may argue that they are not resourced to identify or meet the needs of a wider range of users than they currently serve, and that it is unrealistic to expect them to re-prioritise their existing, committed, resource. Given the public finance situation this might be a powerful argument in favour of the status quo – yet there is a strong counter-argument that many of the activities that would assist the user community are relatively inexpensive. There is a common assumption that users want ever more data on a topic. The (SUF) has suggested to us that this is no longer the case. Users often give more priority to someone being available to explain the existing statistics to them above the desire for more data. These are messages that need to be conveyed more effectively to the statistical community in government.
9. The second argument suggests that the Authority should actively canvass for ideas that will make a difference and not limit itself to a small number of high-profile steps. It might rather lend its support to as many initiatives as it can identify that seem likely to enhance user engagement and then commission work to assess the impact of those initiatives. There are already many existing ideas, some of which are being pursued, including improving websites, helping to support user events and organisations, developing interactive online statistical products, and arranging special events and products. And the idea of the Authority supporting SUF was raised by Professor Adrian Smith (see Annex A). An inventory of steps already being taken to improve user engagement would be helpful and might show up where the deficiencies are.
10. On the third argument, the SUF has pointed to a set of common user priorities that it announced in about 2005 (see attachment to Annex A). It believes that there has been little government response to these priorities. That may or may not be the case and producer bodies may or may not accept the validity of the priorities that were put forward. However, it is clearly essential that bodies that aspire to represent the needs of users to government feel assured that their voice is being heard and are able to convey that message to their members and others. Users can only be expected to invest time and effort in discussing their needs if they believe the statistical service will be responsive. Therefore, the Authority may need to gather tangible evidence of government departments and other producers actually responding directly to identified user requirements and to reassure the SUF on the specific issues raised in the past.
11. Drawing together the action points here, the Authority might consider:
 - i. Inviting the Monitoring and Assessment Team to estimate the proportion of the resources allocated to statistics that is currently devoted to user engagement. This would help the Authority assess in broad terms what this proportion might need to be, in order to support the type of user engagement that it considers appropriate.
 - ii. Taking steps to explain to statisticians in government what better user engagement might look like and what might follow from it. The aim would be to reassure producers of statistics that it is not simply a rod for their backs. Indeed it might prove

to be the route to wider recognition and appreciation of the service they provide. The Code of Practice and Assessment function can be used to drive home the message that effectively user engagement is central to the professional role.

- iii. Canvassing widely, including overseas, for ideas that would improve user engagement and support all such initiatives that seem likely to show benefit. Carry out an inventory of steps already being taken and make an assessment of those to identify where more initiatives are most needed.
 - iv. Developing further central support for the user community – supporting meetings and events and inviting bilateral dialogue with leading user voices – whilst recognising that the user representative bodies are only part of a bigger picture.
 - v. Gathering together examples of government departments and other producer bodies changing their service in direct response to identified user needs – and then seek user views on those examples. This positive feedback - that responding to a user view is demonstrably worth the effort - may be critical to making an iterative approach to improvement self-reinforcing.
 - vi. Inviting its Monitoring and Assessment Team to identify good practice in relation to user engagement (and more generally) as a by-product of its formal Assessment activity
12. This work could be taken forward most coherently in the form of a Monitoring Report. If conducted alongside the report on Long Term Planning any proposals for improving user engagement in a sustained fashion could be part of an input to the next Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). It would also complement work planned by the National Statistician, in her role as Head of the GSS, to improve 'stakeholder engagement' by producer bodies.

Monitoring and Assessment Team, October 2008

List of Annexes

Annex A Letter from Professor Adrian Smith to Sir Michael Scholar

Sir Michael Scholar
Chair of UK Statistics Authority
Statistics House
Myddelton Street
London
EC1R 1UW

5 August 2008

Dear Michael

SUPPORT FOR STATISTICS USER FORUM

One of the long-acknowledged weaknesses in the UK statistical system is the lack of a sufficiently vocal external user community capable of driving the statistical service in the public interest and balancing the priorities of central government departments. The central government users are of course vitally important but they are only one part of a bigger picture. In considering the way forward on this, I have discussed with Richard Alldritt, and informally with some other statistician colleagues, the best way for the Authority to stimulate the user community as a coherent voice.

It seems to be common ground that whilst the Statistics User Forum represents only some of the spectrum of user perspectives, it would nonetheless be in the interests of the statistical service and society generally to give the Forum, and the RSS as its host organisation, some practical support and encouragement.

For reasons mentioned in the attached background note, SUF needs some support. It is a broad church of distinct groups and interests and there is a substantial amount of organisational assistance needed to make it fully effective.

I would therefore like to make a case for the Statistics Authority to offer some administrative support. The level of support I have in mind is perhaps two full time staff equivalents, possibly taking the form of secondments of a couple of able individuals from the Government Statistical Service to the RSS. Such secondments would also provide an excellent training opportunity for the right people.

The outgoing chair of the Forum, Keith Dugmore, put a proposal on similar lines to the Producers and Users Group that Karen Dunnell chairs. The minutes of the PUG meeting on 6 May 2008 record:

'The meeting discussed SUF's need for practical support and how this could be provided by ONS and other Government Departments. It was agreed that in order for this to progress it would be beneficial for SUF to produce a note of what the job would entail. ONS will then produce a trawl to be circulated across the GSS.'

I understand that providing practical support in the form of secondees is less problematic to manage under civil service rules than cash grants. However, one-off funding support for conferences, events and publications etc might also be practicable and might extend to support, via the RSS, to other worthwhile initiatives such as Lord Lipsey's campaign for real statistics – always subject to proper controls and value for money tests.

Our statutory role as the Statistics Authority includes promoting good practice in relation to official statistics. The Code of Practice, currently in draft, places emphasis on understanding the needs of users of statistics and consulting them at all stages. Our discussion, at the Committee for Official Statistics on 22 July, of the need for more effective focus on real user requirements, suggested that the statistical service could benefit greatly by devoting more resource to this. The co-operation of the Forum members in this respect would clearly be helpful.

Internationally, it is common for national statistics institutes in countries with developed statistical systems to support dialogue with user interests though the exact form this takes varies and no very specific analogy can be drawn.

Whilst recognising that SUF is not currently representative of the full range of user interests, it could still serve both as a sounding board of diverse users, as part of the quality assurance processes for the statistical service, and perhaps it might also be stimulated over time to develop into, or become part of, a more comprehensive grouping of user voices.

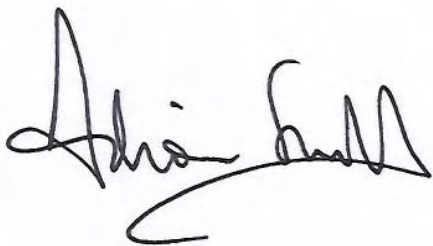
In relation to the fundamental requirement to understand user needs, SUF has shown that it can speak directly for a diverse user community. It has, for example, identified a set of user priorities (listed in the background note) which have received support from the broader family of user interests.

Ultimately, the public good, to which the legislation refers, derives from meeting user needs which in turn serve the public interest. Support for SUF and its future development could thus contribute directly to meeting the fundamental objective of the Statistics and Registration Service Act.

If you are inclined to support this proposal, perhaps we could discuss the matter at either the Authority Board or the Committee for Official Statistics and then expand discussion to include representatives of ESRC and the RSS – the other two current sources of support as mentioned in the background note.

I am copying this letter to Karen Dunnell.

Yours

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adrian Smith', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke underneath the name.

Adrian Smith

Background note on the Statistics Users Forum

The Statistics Users Forum was established in 2004 as the successor to the long-standing Statistics Users Council and with a more formal relationship to the Royal Statistical Society.

As well as some practical support from the RSS such as the provision of meeting rooms and some administrative assistance, it has had funding from the ESRC of £50,000 a year for the first two years, then £65,000 a year until June 2009. We understand that the ESRC may not be willing to continue its contribution which it regards as having been of a pump-priming kind, although it has been suggested informally that proposals for joint funding with one or more other source might be viewed sympathetically by the ESRC.

In addition, some of the constituent user groups of SUF (list below) receive some practical support directly from government departments – for example the Health Statistics User Group has received secretariat support from Department of Health staff at different times, plus support from an ONS staff member as a conference organiser and financial support (£2,000) from the Statistics Commission to fund the attendance of students and voluntary sector staff at a conference. Similarly, the Transport Statistics User Group is supported by Department of Transport and so on.

Whilst government departments have not contributed directly to support for SUF itself, the Statistics Commission provided a total of £30,000 funding to support SUF conferences in the three years to 2007. Some government statisticians also attend SUF meetings as part of their work.

Aims of the statistics users forum

1. Developing and strengthening user groups to help them have a voice - as statistics play an increasingly important part in all sectors, it is vital that users can get their views across and know that they will have an influence. User groups bring users together so that they can share their experience and develop a consensus on what needs to be improved. The Forum works to support user groups so that this role can be developed.
2. Influencing statistics producers - by building and maintaining a dialogue with statistics producers the Forum can make sure that users' views are not only heard but that they have real influence. The Forum can also help producers by ensuring consultation with users is done efficiently and effectively. In particular, the Office for National Statistics is developing its user engagement and has confirmed its wish to give greater support to its involvement with the Forum.
3. Coordinating user community views - statistics are used in many different sectors, with increasing cross-disciplinary use. This makes it even more important that users know that they are using statistics that are produced to high standards. By bringing representatives of user groups together, the Forum can coordinate the views of users and develop consistent policy and compelling arguments. The Forum has adopted five priorities for action (below).
4. Effective help for User Groups - the Statistics User Forum is administered by the Royal Statistical Society. The Society has made the following services available to affiliated user groups on an optional basis:
 - Helping with organising and publicising meetings
 - Facilitating the provision of user group information on the Society's web site, including maintaining a diary of meetings and events
 - Maintaining electronic mailing and discussion lists

- Maintaining an alert system which identifies and alerts the relevant user community to publications, consultation documents, deadlines etc
- Coordinating and sharing responses to consultation exercises

Statistics Users Forum – affiliated user groups

- Association of Census Distributors
- British Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (BURISA)
- Business Statistics User Group
- Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals
- Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics User Group
- Demographics User Group
- Financial and Economic Statistics User Group
- Fire & Rescue Services User Group
- Gender Statistics User Group
- Health Statistics User Group
- International Trade Statistics User Group
- Labour Market Statistics User Group
- Local Authority Research and Intelligence Association (LARIA)
- Output Area Classification User Group
- Society of Business Economists
- Transport Statistics User Group

Co-opted groups

- Market Research Society
- Association of Regional Observatories
- British Society for Population Studies

Observers

- ESRC
- Office for National Statistics
- Local Government Association

SUF user priorities

The Statistics User Forum has agreed that the priorities it will pursue in improving practices and changing policy are:

- **Statistics access teams:**
Government departments should create 'statistics access teams' to help users, particularly by packaging data in convenient formats, and moving to simple "Click-Use" licensing. Government should help non-experts find and use data that has been published, and be alert to how the movement of offices and staff risk leading to a loss of "institutional memory" and to problems in maintaining contacts.
- **UK-wide data:**
The main government departments should address the need for UK-wide consistent statistics, starting with an assessment of the need for UK consistent data in each subject area.
- **Geographic coding:**
Identify an approach to geographic coding which overcomes data confidentiality concerns, and code all records accordingly. Accelerate development of Neighbourhood Statistics in consultation with users.
- **Income statistics:**

Improve statistics on income, in particular but not restricted to on low pay, and take whatever steps are necessary to provide richer statistical information from existing Inland Revenue sources.

- Confidentiality/disclosure:
Ensure sensible restrictions that protect confidentiality, but that allow information to be used appropriately. This includes sharing data across different agencies.
Updating of the Statistics of Trade Act 1947 should be considered in this context.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

SA(COS)(08)06

Leadership and Revitalisation of the GSS

Purpose

1. The Committee for Official Statistics considered the vision, objectives and priorities of the Head of the Government Statistical Service (GSS) for 2008 and beyond at its July meeting [SA(COS)(08)03]. This paper presents revised proposals in light of discussion at that meeting (Annexes A and B), together with a brief description of a project to oversee delivery (paragraphs 4 to 8 below).

Timing

2. Further discussion and endorsement at this second meeting of the Committee for Official Statistics will inform subsequent Committee business, and will enable the Head of the GSS to make timely progress.

Recommendation

3. The Committee is invited to:
 - i. endorse the revised vision, objectives, and priorities;
 - ii. commission, as it sees fit, any further work to describe the implications for members of the GSS in departments and the devolved administrations, and any barriers to implementation;
 - iii. considers ways in which the Authority might itself provide support.

Discussion

4. Seven priority strands of work (Annex A) have been identified for delivering the National Statistician's vision for the GSS. These strands have been set out in further detail (Annex B), by the relevant ONS subject matter experts. This includes the high level approach for delivery, plus the position on current progress of work. A project is being initiated to oversee delivery of these strands led by Caron Walker, Deputy Director responsible for the National Statistics and International Division (NSID) of ONS. Further information about the project can be made available.
5. Each strand will be formally defined and managed by a workstream manager, from initiation through to closure, via a workstream definition document. This will build on the current high level approach (Annex B), to ensure the following elements are defined and agreed in line with good practice project management:
 - i. explicit objectives including scope inclusions and exclusions, scope constraints and scope dependencies;
 - ii. measurable success criteria e.g. how will we know that all official statistics meet known user and quality needs and represent value for money?
 - iii. clear ownership, organisation and governance arrangements to support collaboration across ONS and the GSS;
 - iv. a plan for what is needed to deliver the scope, and who needs to be involved, from doing the work, through consultation and quality review, to final sign off;
 - v. a plan for identifying and managing risks, assumptions, issues, dependencies;
 - vi. regular, structured reporting processes.
6. Next step: Workstream definitions are being prepared during October as a foundation for

consultation and engagement.

7. A project manager has been assigned to the project, who will work to Office for Government Commerce (OGC) standards and guidelines. In addition to the workstreams, this approach will provide:
 - i. a joined up plan where the synergies between workstreams are known and exploited, both in terms of scheduling, and prioritisation;
 - ii. an overall communications strategy and plan that seeks to overcome barriers, and supports a collaborative GSS approach;
 - iii. a single reporting, change control and escalation process for all workstreams;
 - iv. assurance that realistic plans are communicated for what is to be done, when, and by who; assurance that regular, accurate reports are delivered back to the Committee for Official Statistics on what has or has not been achieved.
8. Next step: A short Project Initiation Document (PID) will be prepared, including the plans and processes described above.

Background

9. The complementary roles of National Statistician, Chief Executive of the ONS and Head of the GSS are undertaken by one person. The former two roles are addressed in the Statistics Act, and this is therefore a timely opportunity to refresh the role of the Head of the GSS in the context of efforts to 'revitalise' the Service.
10. In the past, the absence of statutory authority over statistical activities in government departments and agencies has made it difficult for successive National Statisticians to influence the governance of statistics or statistical standards outside their own Offices. At the same time, a range of organisational and managerial issues* have forced them to focus on the operation of their own Office, arguably to the detriment of the wider statistical service.
11. While the Statistics Authority has the remit to "promote and safeguard the production and publication of statistics that serve the public good", the Head of the GSS has an important complementary role to play in advising the Authority and co-ordinating the response of all producers of official statistics to the Authority's requirements and guidance.
12. Decentralised statistical systems have real advantages over more centralised ones in providing a responsive and policy-relevant service. But we all recognise that it is not as easy for the decentralised service within UK Government to promulgate and enforce consistent standards and plan on behalf of the wider user community. As the Head of the GSS I want to lead work to build on the strengths, to tackle the challenges facing the UK Government's statistical system and strengthen the relationship on statistical matters between the four administrations in the UK. The following statement summarises the role that I intend to play.

**Karen Dunnell, National Statistician
October 2008.**

* (Successive National Statisticians have dealt with the Pickford Review (1989), the merger of Central Statistical Office (CSO) and the Office for Population, Census and Surveys (OPCS) into ONS (1996), the launch of the original National Statistics system (2000), and the introduction of statistical legislation in the form of the Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007) and supporting Statutory Instruments).

List of Annexes

- Annex A Statement by the National Statistician on the Role of the Head of the GSS
[Revised]**
- Annex B Leadership of the GSS, Objectives and Priorities [Revised]**

Annex A - Statement by National Statistician on the role of the Head of the Government Statistical Service (GSS)

The GSS comprises all those people and resources who contribute to the provision of official statistics in the UK and adhere to the National Statistician's Code of Conduct.

My vision is of a self-aware and confident and mutually supportive GSS network providing a cohesive service, comprising high quality statistics, analysis and advice, to meet the needs of decision makers inside and outside government. In order to realise this vision, my priorities are:

Leadership and management

- a. to lead and manage the GSS as a shared professional community
- b. to produce a government-wide statistical plan that demonstrably serves the public good meeting users needs wherever possible

Improvement

- c. to improve the methods, standards and quality of official statistics, including their consistency, coherence, analysis and commentary
- d. to improve public confidence in official statistics through development of the service, its governance and improving accessibility to, and presentation of statistics
- e. to improve the use of statistics and statistical analysis in decision making, alongside other analytical evidence
- f. to support all parts of the GSS in exploiting the statistical potential of data held elsewhere in government by making data-sharing a matter of routine
- g. to exert real and lasting influence over international statistical developments in line with agreed GSS perspectives

There is synergy between a number of these priorities, and clearly they will all require sustained effort if they are to be realised - not least to overcome the effects of inertia, as well as structural barriers. I shall address these priorities by:

- chairing the GSS committees that provide leadership to the service and develop statistical policy
- playing an advocacy role with opinion formers, representatives of external users, Heads of other Analytical Groups, Permanent Secretaries and Analytical Champions
- reinforcing the role of Heads Of Profession (HoP) in their employing organisations, supporting them on professional matters, and raising common/strategic issues at the highest levels of government
- developing and promulgating standards and guidance across the full range of producers of official statistics, and supporting their implementation – in relation to user engagement, communication of statistics, access, dissemination and the quality of the statistics etc – consistent with the Authority's Code of Practice.
- co-ordinating recruitment and training, the sharing of specialist expertise, the development of statistical leadership, and international engagement across the GSS

- strengthening and focusing the support to the GSS from a dedicated Office for National Statistics (ONS) team.

Annex B – Leadership of the Government Statistical Service (GSS) Objectives and Priorities

Leadership of the GSS – The Professional Statistical Community

Objective

To lead and manage the GSS as a shared professional community

What success will look like

1. Sufficient numbers of effective and developed staff of all grades in place throughout the GSS – both Professional Statisticians and the wider GSS
2. Statisticians developing their skills and competences in order to improve the quality and effectiveness of official statistics and to maximise their potential
3. Future statistical leaders are identified and developed
4. Statisticians are easily able to move throughout the GSS in order to develop their careers and to ensure the spread of skills and knowledge throughout the community
5. Statisticians will have frequent opportunities to attend events in order to network with each other and other members of the analytical community, thus increasing their knowledge and improve their skills
6. The Head of the GSS and her support staff will regularly consult with, and take into account the views of, other government departments.
7. GSS members will understand and strive for an agreed common purpose and collaborate effectively with each other and other analysts.
8. The GSS is recognised across government and beyond for its professional standards and contribution to public policy making.

Current position

1. The areas above are those identified in a paper produced for the Independence Professional Matters Steering Committee as necessary for the strategic management of the professional cadre of the GSS.
2. The GSS Human Resources Committee (HRC) operates an annual work programme and is working towards developing areas 1 – 6 above.
3. The 2007 Ramsden Review of Professional Support Units recommended that the Statisticians in Government Team (SiGT) should be strengthened and employ a more strategic approach in developing the GSS. The Review recommended that the team should be headed by a more senior member of staff than at present in order to effect change across government. There was also a recommendation that the team be more outward facing, following the best practice of other units.

Deliverables/timescales/owners

1. Report on GSS HRC progress presented to Heads of Profession (HoPs) each year and reported in GSS Annual Report
2. Work agreed, developed and monitored by GSS HRC, which meets up to 6 times a year and comprises representatives from a number of government departments. It is chaired by John Custance of Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and supported by staff in SiGT.
3. Greater linkage with issues in Office for National Statistics (ONS) is required. Issues concerning statisticians are developed separately in ONS and GSS and further co-operation between the two is required. This should be co-ordinated by a Director on behalf of Karen.

Barriers

1. Different individuals and departments within the community have conflicting views about issues because of different cultures and situations. This may impact on the ability to agree policies
2. Departments within the GSS may not comply with centrally agreed policies if they feel that it is not in their interests to do so or if the policies are not appropriate for their needs.
3. Head of GSS needs to engage with stakeholders.

Views/positions of other stakeholders

1. Principal stakeholders are Heads of Profession. Their views may vary, especially those from the devolved administrations or the National Health Service (NHS) Information Centre

Resource implications

1. Whilst the GSS HRC work programme is addressing many of the recommendations of the Independence Professional Matters Steering Committee it is likely that additional resources will be required in order to deliver the proposals. In addition, further resources will be required to implement the recommendations of the 2007 Ramsden Review. Provisional estimates are that 3 additional posts are required in SiGT (1 x Grade 6, 1 x Grade 7, 1 x Administrative Officer)

Leadership of the GSS – Statistical Plans

Objective

To produce a government-wide statistical plan that demonstrably serves the 'public good', meeting user needs wherever possible.

What success will look like

1. regular evaluation and review of procedures that ensure plans remains relevant
2. an approach to planning that enjoys the trust and confidence of its stakeholders, which will in turn lend legitimacy to the plans, decisions and direction of the statistical service
3. regular and open engagement with all stakeholders at the right time to be of most influence (e.g. Comprehensive Spending Review), to provide the information necessary to determine user needs, both short-term and long-term
4. effective prioritisation processes

Current Position

1. The National Statistics planning process is characterised by the following:
 - a lack of strategic direction
 - the National Statistician having no authority to direct departmental resources other than for her own
 - it has proved virtually impossible to produce coherent plans across the disparate government departments
 - Devolved administrations have and need their own planning and governance arrangements
 - Confusion between planning within UK Government and inter administration issues resulting in neither set of issues being planned effectively
 - Theme Working Groups have not played the role that had been expected, in this regard.
2. This has contributed to some high profile instances where we have 'failed' our stakeholders. Recent examples include:
 - the inability of producers of migration statistics to meet the needs of policy makers, resulting in the National Statistician setting up a special task force
 - the unannounced cuts by ONS to the sample size of the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, which resulted in an outcry amongst users.

Deliverables/Timescales/Owners

1. New governance and planning arrangements for the GSS. Senior cross-government committees will be introduced, chaired by the National Statistician, to provide strategic direction to statistical planning activity, and to influence departmental planning. These committees will be introduced during 2008/09.
2. A new top level inter administration committee to provide strategic direction on inter administration issues
3. New guidance on best practice to ensure adequate levels of user engagement across the GSS. To be introduced across the GSS during 2009/10

4. Complementary statistics plans aimed at providing:
 - A response to the challenges posed by the UK Statistics Authority
 - a high-level strategic plan for the UK statistics system, published every 3 - 5 years which will focus on cross-cutting issues
 - annual statistics plans for each administration and for inter administration issues focusing upon short-term priorities, innovations and developments. New planning arrangements will be developed during 2008/09 with a view to delivering coherent annual statistics plans for the period 2009 /10.
 - Departmental and Thematic plans within UK Government for 2009
5. An approach to accounting across the GSS that will help us identify statistical service costs and thus prioritise our work – 2008-09
6. Develop stakeholder satisfaction survey/response mechanisms - 2009
7. Develop some metrics (2009) to determine the success or otherwise of the other key objectives:
 - anticipate and plan for the major challenges to be faced
 - provide value for money
 - produce relevant and trusted statistics
 - increase the influence of statistics in decision making
 - provide effective feedback mechanisms for stakeholders

All deliverables are the responsibility of the National Statistics and International Division (NSID), accountable to the National Statistician and HOPs/Chiefs other than issues within devolved administrations.

Barriers

1. the decentralised nature of the UK statistics system, in which HoPs serve two masters - policy colleagues operationally, and the National Statistician professionally
2. a weak GSS brand throughout government, with statisticians have little influence within their departments, and the National Statistician's influence with fellow Permanent Secretaries being limited
3. the distance between ONS and policy colleagues

Views/Positions of other stakeholders

1. UK Government users want to see evidence of a priority setting process based on sound financial decisions - particularly the Bank of England and HM Treasury (HMT) – and also want their needs to be given highest priority
2. non-Government users have expressed for some time their view of the need for a more transparent process, where their views expressed are considered and discussed, even if not acted upon
3. The Statistics Authority has expressed a need to improve stakeholder engagement so there is a need for us to respond

Resource implications

The resource implications for improved planning processes are negligible. This is all about working smarter with the resources currently at our disposal.

Leadership of the GSS – Methodology, Standards & Quality

Objective

To improve the methodology, standards and quality of official statistics, including their consistency, coherence, analysis and commentary.

What success will look like:

1. All official statistics to meet known user needs, at an identified level of quality required for their purposes, and represent value for money
2. Programme of high level quality assurance by self assessment of methodology, standards¹ and quality
3. Programme of in-depth quality assurance of methodology, standards and quality
4. Monitoring of (2) and (3) to identify and disseminate best practice
5. Maintenance, extension and promotion of methodological best practice and standards for official statistics
6. All official statistics outputs to have published quality output measures
7. All official statistics processes and outputs to have associated documentation

Current position

1. The status is not known on the prevalence of known user needs knowledge across the GSS.
2. A GSS self assessment checklist (Government Statistical Service Self Assessment Checklist (GSSSAC)) has been previously developed and piloted. With some modification it could be used as a tool for high level quality assurance by self assessment of methodology, standards and quality.
3. National Statistics Quality Reviews were previously put on hold. A programme of in-depth quality assurance now needs to be initiated. The approach could focus on problems areas identified by GSSSAC.
4. There has been little central monitoring and collation of previous reviews especially in relation to methodology, standards and quality.
5. Methodological best practice and standards are currently disseminated via the web.
6. There are no central records about the production and dissemination of quality output measures across the GSS.
7. There are no central records about the prevalence of process and output documentation across the GSS.

Deliverables/timescales/owners

1. Initiation of high level quality assurance by self assessment using GSSSAC. GSSSAC could include self assessment of known user needs, statistical methods and processes, standards, compliance with the code of practice, documentation, quality measures, methods of analysis, statistical commentary and possibly burden costs. The Quality Centre (ONS) could initiate, oversee, monitor, collate, and disseminate best practice. To begin in 2008.
2. Further work is required in defining quality assurance, developing a programme of in-depth quality assurance of methodology, standards and quality, and collating official statistics information on the prevalence of process and output documentation.
3. Government departments and devolved administrations to produce and publish quality output measures as defined in the GSS Quality Guidelines.

¹ Including classifications and harmonised definitions.

Barriers

1. GSS commitment and competing priorities particularly in the face of weak user demand in some areas.
2. Staff resources
3. Delays in collating evidence to identify and disseminate best practice and lack of central expertise.
4. Failure to identify what best practice is, particularly where there are practical limitations to what can be achieved

Views/positions of other stakeholders

1. The UK Statistics Authority is likely to view the above proposals positively as they align with their own objectives. They may ask for evidence of reviews covering methodology, standards and quality of official statistics during designation assessments.
2. Other stakeholders are likely to view high level self assessment positively as a key activity in preparation for designation reviews. They may regard the in-depth quality assurance as an unnecessary overhead.

Resource implications

This has resource implications for all producers of statistical outputs but work aligns with preparation for designation assessments and the objectives of the UK Statistics Authority (to promote and safeguard (a) the quality of official statistics, (b) good practice in relation to official statistics).

ONS has recently created a GSS Methodology Consultancy Service to support the GSS in improving methodology, standards and quality.

There are also significant resources implications for the Quality Centre in ONS.

Leadership of the GSS – Public Confidence in Official Statistics (PCOS)

Objective

To improve public confidence in official statistics through development of the service, its governance, and improving the accessibility and presentation of statistics

What success will look like

1. improvements in the key indicators derived from the Omnibus PCOS module and Scottish Social Attitudes Survey- %s believing that our figures are accurate, %s believing that figures are compiled without political interference, and overall assessment of the range of statistical series asked about
2. improvements in the assessments of official statistics and the quality of the service, provided by a panel of non-governmental opinion formers
3. improvements in the assessments of official statistics and the quality of the service, provided by government departments in their Service Level Agreements (SLA) reports
4. improvements in the proportion of broadly positive press coverage
5. a fully operational, highly-functional Publication Hub, and new style press conferences – and external recognition of this separation of statistical releases from policy comment, plus parallel arrangements in devolved administrations

Current position

1. Public confidence in official statistics is low, and the latest module shows results almost identical to those in 2004. Key aggregates (2008) are:
 - a. % believing that figures are compiled without political interference (20%)
 - b. % believing that official statistics are generally accurate (26%)
2. The views of opinion formers were explored by MORI on behalf of the Statistics Commission on 2004. Whilst the results were not quantitative, they do lend themselves to a summary assessment, and were a key input to the PCOS strategy. Follow up activity could include establishing a panel of opinion formers, which would help explore changes over time.
3. Press coverage is not currently monitored. But by doing so, and classifying references as positive/neutral/critical, baselines could be established. This would also help identify the views expressed in specific media outlets, and views by topic.
4. Although a cross-GSS group developed a PCOS strategy in 2006 – founded on improved communication, better engagement with stakeholders, improved accessibility, quality improvement – it has not been systematically implemented in UK Government. Despite the changes in the organisation of statistics since 2006, the key elements of the strategy still appear to be relevant. It needs to be driven forward by Karen and on her behalf

Deliverables / timescales / owners

1. An annual report to the Authority, summarising the latest information gleaned by the above means, and progress in implementing the strategy itself.
2. The Authority, and in the first instance, the Official Statistics committee, would take ownership of the results, and would provide strategic guidance on priorities.
3. A Publication Hub fully operational by 2009
4. The whole process should be coordinated by the Director of National Statistics Planning Group (NSPG), on behalf of Karen. The different strands in the PCOS strategy need to be owned by the relevant Deputy Director, and this work should feature in their Performance Agreement.

Barriers

1. This is a challenging objective, and it has to be recognised that external events can negatively influence the public's views of official statistics. Nevertheless, the Head of the GSS cannot duck the challenge.
2. Establishing a panel of opinion formers.
3. Adversarial political system and critical media

Views / positions of other stakeholders

1. The Authority is likely to view the above proposals positively, as they are consistent with the Authority's own objectives.
2. Other stakeholders, inside and outside government, are likely to welcome the opportunity to pipe their views directly to producers

Resource implications

Little additional resource is required. The activities described above should be implemented at a working level by Stakeholder Engagement Branch as part of its new remit in relation to the ONS Stakeholder Engagement strategy (though recognising that this work on Karen's behalf would have a GSS-wide focus).

Running the PCOS module in alternative years would cost, on average, about £15k per annum.

Leadership of the GSS – use of statistics in decision making and operational delivery

Objective

To improve the use of statistics in decision making, and operational delivery, alongside other analytical evidence

What success will look like

1. That big decisions taken by key stakeholders are guided by official statistics
2. That policy makers will routinely use evidence and analytical expertise and techniques throughout the policy cycle
3. That all policy departments will appoint a senior analyst or analytical champion on departmental boards
4. That civil service businesses will routinely use evidence and analytical expertise when evaluating the effectiveness of their operational delivery
5. That all analytical professions will engage with stakeholders to ensure clear messages reach the decision makers
6. That decision makers proactively seek enhancements in the evidence base and make such demands of the GSS

Current position

1. Varying levels of knowledge of the uses made of statistics across the broad range of stakeholders – this makes it difficult to assess impact
2. The capability reviews have shown that there is a mixed position in departments. Out of 17 departments assessed 3 have urgent development needs in the category 'basing choices on evidence' and 3 have development needs. 11 have been assessed as strong or well placed.
3. Some departments have appointed or are planning to appoint cross disciplinary heads of analysis.
4. Support for the initiative from the Head of the Civil Service.
5. Analysis and Use of Evidence is one of the core Professional Skills for Government skills required of all civil servants of Grade 7 and above. This requires staff to recognise the need for using evidence when devising policy or managing operational delivery and understanding that evidence.
6. Heads of all Professions are currently considering the use of greater professional evidence.
7. In Scotland a cross disciplinary heads of analysis structure has existed for some time

Deliverables/timescales/owners

1. Improved methods of engagement with all stakeholders in place by 2009
2. The heads of the analytical professions, including the National Statistician, are now meeting regularly to discuss how these issues should be tackled and propose ways forward. GSS HoPs should discuss the forward agenda of the Heads of Analytical Profession meetings.
3. The professional analytical support teams also meet regularly in order to support the Heads of Analysis
4. Annual conference developed for analytical heads of professions and analytical champions
5. Report produced on 2007 survey of analysts
6. Areas to be developed include improving the use of evidence in departments, improving the allocation of analytic resources and joining up across professions

Barriers

1. Lack of understanding of stakeholder needs
2. Permanent Secretaries need to be convinced of the importance of this work and appoint board level analysts or analytical champions
3. Some confusion in departments about the roles of different analysts
4. No additional resources in analytical support teams to develop this work
5. Policy advisors may not want evidence to get in the way of a good policy!
6. It is frequently the case that policy makers and/or analysts do not fully understand the full potential of the analytical contribution and processes to identify this are imperfect. So the contribution is often well short of what it might be

Views/positions of other stakeholders

1. All analysts are generally supportive of the initiative. The trick will be to persuade policy makers and other non analysts of its importance. Better processes for collaboration will be needed

Resource implications

1. At present this work is being done within existing resources by staff in the existing analytical support teams. However because of the size of SiGT most of the work is carried out by staff in the other teams. Additional staff resources at, say, G6 level, would enable the statistician community to have more influence on the agenda.

Leadership of the GSS – Data Sharing

Objective

To support all parts of the GSS in exploiting the statistical potential of data held elsewhere in government by making data-sharing a matter of routine.

What success will look like

1. Full exploitation of the existing legal and policy framework for sharing data for statistics.
2. Where the existing legal framework is found to be inadequate, an orderly flow of secondary legislation successfully laid before Parliament to allow data sharing between ONS and public authorities.
3. Culture of data sharing for statistical purposes embraced by Ministers and GSS, expressed through a common policy.
4. Ethical oversight of data sharing is in place and is contributing to public confidence in data sharing for statistics.
5. Statistics Authority (Annual) Report(s) able to reflect the above and that, in turn, is commended by Parliamentary Committees to whom it reports.

Current position

1. List of strategic priorities developed by GSS, approved by Statistics Authority and presented to Minister for the Cabinet Office.
2. Political interest in improving migration & population statistics has created momentum amongst relevant Departments (eg Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)).
3. Reducing administrative burden on businesses by sharing of HMRC data on a longer timescale but also capable of arousing Ministerial interest.
4. Other more routine data sharing (eg business data from ONS to Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Northern Ireland (DETINI) and Bank of England (BoE), Joint Unemployment Vacancies Operating System (JUVOS) data from DWP to ONS) at different stages of development.
5. Governance of data sharing and confidentiality under review.

Deliverables/timescales/owners

1. Annual Report by GSS to Statistics Authority and thereafter to Parliament(s).
2. High level Steering Group now established and chaired by Director of National Statistics Planning Group (NSPG). Other key members include Director of Sources and Director of Demography and Regional Statistics. Will fit into other plans for governance of GSS and Statistics Policy Committee.
3. Preparation of proposals to be jointly owned by Deputy Directors of National Statistics & International Division (NSID) and of Administrative Sources & Integration Division (ASID).

Barriers

1. High profile privacy and data security concerns
2. Political support is essential to help to foster a culture across government that data sharing for statistical purposes is a good thing.
3. Head of GSS needs to respond to emerging statistical and analytical needs by encouraging early consideration of data sharing.
4. Need to be wary of Government Departments being unwilling to cooperate unless data sharing is two-way.

5. Head of the GSS to ensure a co-operative approach to data sharing that serves the wider public good is not subsumed by competing departmental pressures and priorities.

View/positions of other stakeholders

1. Statistics Authority support essential and expected to be forthcoming.
2. Principal other stakeholders are Government Departments across administrations (and their Ministers) who vary in attitude to data sharing. Early wins with key Departments like DWP and HMRC may create an improved climate.

Resource implications

1. No present need for additional resources for strategic activity in relation to data sharing as present level of activity able to be supported by NSID/ASID.
2. Operational aspects would bring resource implications in terms of determining information technology requirements, security standards, appropriate training etc
3. A new political imperative (on a similar scale to improving population & migration statistics) would place a severe strain on those resources

Leadership of the GSS - International

Objective

To exert real and lasting influence over international statistical developments in line with agreed GSS perspectives.

What success will look like

1. Official membership of influential European and international statistical organisations/bureaux - United Nations Statistical Committee (UNSC), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Committee on Statistics (C/STAT), European Partnership Group (PG), Eurostat Statistical Programme Committee (SPC), and Director Generals of Institutes of National Statistics (DGINS).
2. Active participation in these organisations (plus others including International Monetary Fund (IMF), International Labour Organisation (ILO), and European Council) to provide a coordinated and strategic GSS input. This is achieved by engaging with stakeholders, promoting cooperation, ensuring effective contributions (including work on definitions, methodology and legislation), challenging the status quo, and shaping the future direction of international statistical policy.
3. Enabling an effective GSS contribution to statistical capacity building programmes in developing countries.
4. Championing the use of "international best practice" across the GSS, including the implementation of the European Statistical Code of Practice (ESCAP) and its underlying principles.
5. Promoting the sharing of international information and experience across the GSS and encouraging the healthy exchange of GSS staff with international counterparts.
6. Recognising, understanding and solving statistical pressures and conflicts which arise between national, European, and global statistical systems.
7. The UK Statistical System enjoying a strong reputation internationally for its expertise, pro-activity and influence.

Current position

1. The National Statistician is an official member of UNSC bureau, OECD C/STAT, European PG, Eurostat SPC, and DGINS.
2. The National Statistician actively participates - but with greater resources, more emphasis and priority could be given to challenging current thinking and influencing development in line with GSS wants and needs.
3. Some coordination of Commonwealth Statistical Conference takes place (re travel fund) and we have some interaction with Department for International Development (DFID). ONS has no financial commitment to engage in statistical capacity building, and recent headcount/resource pressures have minimised commitments to get involved. DFID are considering how to call upon ONS expertise more effectively.
4. Some activity through Peer Review process and via GSS International Committee. More could be done here – possibly in the context of Assessment.
5. Improved coordination through GSS International Committee and some isolated examples of international exchange. More could be done here.
6. The National Statistician is aware of tensions, mainly through active participation in high-level international events. Issues are dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

Deliverables/timescales/owners

1. UNSC meets for one week every February in New York. OECD C/STAT meets for two days every June alternating between Paris and Geneva. European PG currently meets in Voorburg (the location of the Chair) around four times a year. SPC also meets around four times year, usually in Luxembourg. DGINS is hosted annually by National Statistical Institutes across the EU. Participation at these events usually involves the National Statistician, the DfID HOP, and the Director of NSID. Additionally, appropriate GSS representation is sought for DGINS. International Relations Branch coordinates all briefing and logistics.
2. As above.
3. Deliverables: Guidance on how GSS can improve its statistical capacity building programmes. Timescales: TBC. Owners: National Statistician, HOPs and NSPG.
4. Deliverables: High level of compliance with ESCOP across GSS through good performance at Peer Review, and by means of Assessment. Timescales: TBC. Owners: National Statistician, HOPs and NSPG.
5. Deliverables: More exchange of staff across GSS staff internationally (and clear strategy for this). Continuing and strengthening GSS International Committee. Timescales: TBC. Owners: National Statistician, HOPs and NSPG (with some HR involvement).
6. Deliverables: Strategies to handle events and problems that arise. Timescales: n/a. Owners: National Statistician, HOPs and NSPG.

Barriers

1. Ensuring continuity of membership when National Statistician changes.
2. National work pressures preventing honouring of international commitments.
- 3, 5. Time. Financial commitment. Resource levels.
- 4, 6. No significant barriers.

Views/positions of other stakeholders

1. Other National Statistics Institutes welcome UK's membership of, and active participation in, international statistical organisations. The UK statistical system is regarded as unusual (and of interest) in the extent of its decentralisation and devolution, and is well regarded for its commitment to quality, methodological development and (since the Statistics Act) its innovative governance.
2. DFID would welcome more engagement with GSS.

Resource implications

1. Travel and subsistence. Not significant.
2. As above.
3. Likely to generate net income but needs to be underwritten. Diversion of resources from national to international activity can be beneficial for staff morale, retention and development but - in an environment where there is little spare national capacity - may cause short-term deterioration to national work programmes.
4. Not significant.
5. Greater exchange of staff will incur up front costs.
6. Not significant.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY
COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

SA(COS)(08)07

The UK Statistical System

Purpose

1. This is a further iteration of the paper which was presented to the first meeting of the Committee on Official Statistics, *The UK Statistical System* [SA(COS)(08)02]. This described the essential features of the UK statistical system and highlighted those elements of the system which might pose a particular challenge for the Committee.
2. This latest iteration of the paper includes:
 - a new Annex – **Annex A(ii)** – which describes the extent to which the UK statistical system has already, and will continue to be, expanded by a series of *Official Statistics Orders* listing each of the non-Crown Bodies which have been deemed by Ministers to be producers of official statistics.
 - a new Annex – **Annex B(i)** – which describes the framework of ‘User Groups’ who use official statistics, and how they connect to the overall GSS Committee structure.

Recommendations

3. The Committee for Official Statistics are invited to:
 - note the key features of the UK statistical system which are set out in the attached discussion paper (and supporting Annexes), and the challenges they pose;
 - consider the new governance arrangements which have been put in place to complement those devised for the Authority;
 - commission any further papers that may be required on this topic.

James Denman, National Statistics and International Division (ONS), October 2008

List of Annexes:

Annex A Discussion paper: The UK Statistical System

Annex A(i) The Size and Extent of the GSS component of the UK Statistics System

Annex A(ii) Other Producers of Official Statistics (who are neither Crown bodies nor affiliated to the GSS)

Annex B Diagram of the UK Statistical System

Annex B(i) The non-Government User Community

Annex C Different Categories of Official Statistics

Annex A - Discussion Paper: The UK Statistical System

Introduction

1. The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 provides only a partial description of the UK statistical system over which the UK Statistics Authority now presides. The Act incorporates several features retained from earlier statistical reforms but makes no mention, for instance, of the 'Government Statistical Service' which was launched 40 years ago and which, currently, acts as a lynchpin for the whole UK system. The Act also departs from tradition by creating the conditions for expanding the UK statistical system well beyond its historical or traditional borders. This paper provides further details about the new arrangements established under the Act and describes the extent to which that system might pose challenges for the Statistics Authority.

Key Features of the UK Statistical system

2. The UK Statistical system which has evolved since the Second World War can be characterised by five distinct features:

Decentralisation

- 2.1 Decentralisation, whereby each Government Department or Agency retains responsibility for the production of statistics relating to its own areas of policy or operational responsibility, has been a key feature of the UK statistical system since its inception. It has also been described as both a source of strength for the system (insofar as it keeps statisticians close to their policy customers and maintains statistical expertise across government) as well as a source of weakness (because it can create conflicts of loyalty by requiring government statisticians to serve two masters – the needs of their departments, as well as the demands of their profession).

The Government Statistical Service (GSS)

- 2.2 The GSS, which was established in 1968, is an umbrella community which is spread across about 40 separate government departments and agencies and which provides the glue that binds government statisticians together, and counters the centrifugal forces of decentralisation. It is led by a cadre of professional statisticians, coordinated by ONS from the centre, thereby ensuring that official statistics are managed in accordance with a professional framework. It consists of all those statisticians and other analysts across government, as well as their support staff, who are responsible for the collection, production, analysis and dissemination of official statistics, and who are ultimately responsible to the National Statistician, acting in her capacity as the Head of the GSS, through their own departmental Head of Profession. The Table in **Annex A(i)** shows the size of the GSS and the extent of its statistical reach. The National Statistician's governance of the GSS is implemented through the new cross-government committee system illustrated in **Annex B(i)**. (Further information on the GSS statistical work planning system is given in a separate paper). Two other features of the GSS are also worth mentioning:

GSS Heads of Profession

- 2.3 The operational viability of the GSS depends on a network of Heads of Profession known colloquially as 'HoPs'. Twenty three UK Government Departments/Agencies which have a significant GSS 'presence' - in terms of either their production or use of GSS statistics – have appointed their own designated Statistical Head of Profession. Five organisations in the three devolved administrations have done likewise. As well as being accountable to their own Ministers and departmental line managers, and working closely with the heads of the other analytical professions in their departments, these Heads of Profession/Chief Statistician are responsible to the National Statistician for the professional competence and quality of the statisticians

and statistics which they manage.

Statisticians in Government Team (SiGT)

2.4 On personnel matters, the National Statistician fulfils her role as Head of the GSS with the help of the SiGT which is a dedicated unit positioned within the ONS responsible for setting and maintaining standards across the GSS covering professional recruitment, qualifications, training, development and promotion.

Devolution

2.5 The decentralised organisation of official statistics in the UK was further reinforced ten years ago by the Devolution Settlement of 1998 which assigned responsibility for the production of official statistics between the UK Government, and the three separate administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, depending on whether those statistics relate to 'reserved matters' (i.e. matters reserved to the UK Government) or 'devolved matters'. Although all three of the devolved administrations have signed-up to the spirit of the Statistics Act, they have retained the right to mould certain legislative features to suit their own local circumstances – pre-release access being a case in point. Whilst some would argue that devolution has compromised the coherence of statistics across the UK, others would argue that it has made official statistical more relevant to the separate constituencies they serve. A new Inter-Administration Committee (IAC) has been established to oversee this area (See **Annex B(i)**).

Designation

2.6 Since June 2000, when the concept of 'National Statistics' was first launched, each of the statistical products managed by each organisation affiliated to the GSS have been labelled and branded according to whether or not they comply with a professional Code of Practice. Clause 12 of the Act allows all official statistics which were labelled as 'National Statistics' before April 2008 to retain their designation unless, and until, their designation is re-assessed by the Authority's Assessment Team. It remains to be seen whether the compliance regime which prevailed under the previous non-statutory system will stand up to close examination by the Authority's Assessment and Monitoring Team.

A new feature

2.7 As well as retaining the four historical features described above, the Act has also introduced an entirely new dimension by introducing the concept of 'official statistics'. This concept extends the Statistics Authority's remit to cover not only those statistics produced by the GSS, but also all of the 'statistics' produced by Crown bodies, howsoever defined. In addition, the Act goes even further by extending the boundaries of the UK statistical system, and the Authority's remit, by giving Government Ministers the option to extend the definition of 'official statistics' to embrace, in addition, any statistics produced by any of the Non-Crown Bodies which either come under their Ministerial jurisdiction, or are linked to their Department in some way (See **Annex A(ii)**). It is difficult at this early stage to determine what impact this latest reform will have on the system simply because very little is known about the kinds of statistics these Non-Crown Bodies produce. (**Annex C** provides further details of the different categories of official statistics which now come within the Authority's remit). Here again, it remains to be seen whether this expansion in scope will prove to be an operational challenge for the Authority.

Annex A(i) - The Size and Extent of the GSS component of the UK Statistics System

(Note: Inevitably, future Government changes will necessitate changes to this Table)

The GSS comprises some 6,500 persons, the vast majority of whom are Civil Servants, about half of whom work in the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The remainder work in 36 other UK Government Departments and Agencies, and in four statistical organisations in the two devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales, 27 of which have appointed their own Head of Profession for Statistics. About 80% of all professionals in the GSS work outside the ONS alongside their policy colleagues. Although the equivalent staff in Northern Ireland are not affiliated to the GSS, they work very closely with the GSS and share a common professional culture. Together, the GSS manages a wide range of censuses, surveys and data sources from which they produce some 1,600 individual statistical products, about 80% of which are labelled as Code-compliant 'National Statistics'. About four fifths of all official statistics designated as 'National Statistics' are produced by GSS members working outside the ONS in other organisations.

Department Administration Agency	HoP (•)	No. of GSS staff**	of which professional staff	Total Number of Products	of which 'National Statistics' Products	of which Other 'Official Statistics' or Products
Audit Commission		1	1	-	-	-
Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR)	•	80	44	28	22	6
Cabinet Office (CO)	•	3	1	-	-	-
Children, Schools, and Families (Department for) (DCSF)	•	323	100	37	37	-
Communities and Local Government (CLG)	•	77	53	50	30	20
Competition Commission		2	2	-	-	-
Culture, Media and Sport (Department for) (DCMS)	•	12	5	3	2	1
Defence Analytical Services Agency (DASA)	•	200	75	19	17	2
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Department for) (DEFRA)	•	129	46	73	67	6
Food Standards Agency (FSA)	•	6	5	-	-	-
Forestry Commission (FC)	•	7	3	17	5	12
General Register Office for Scotland (GRO(S))***	•	100	17	(45)	(41)	(4)
Health (Department of) (DH)	•	48	48	18	12	6
Health and Safety Executive (HSE)	•	40	17	6	4	2
HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC)	•	650	125	81	79	2
HM Treasury (HMT)	•	27	22	4	4	-

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Highways Agency		2	2	-	-	-
Home Office (HO)	•	106	24	16	13	3
House of Commons Library		1	1	-	-	-
Information Centre for Health & Social Care (IC)	•	300	52	62	41	21
Information Services Division – Scotland (ISD(S))***	•	200	1	(46)	(36)	(10)
Innovation, Universities, and Skills (Department for) (DIUS)	•	(See DCFS)		12	12	-
Insolvency Service		3	3	-	-	-
International Development (Department for) (DfID)	•	30	26	3	1	2
Local Government Data Unit		1	1	-	-	-
Ministry of Justice (MoJ)	•	65	28	24	14	10
National Audit Office (NAO)		3	3	-	-	-
Office for National Statistics*	•	3,374	219	376	267	109
Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)	•	20	19	-	-	-
Office of Fair Trading (OfT)		5	5	-	-	-
Office of Manpower Economics (OME)	•	7	7	4	-	4
Office of Rail Regulation		3	3	-	-	-
Office of Telecommunications		1	1	-	-	-
Office of Water Services (OfWat)		2	2	-	-	-
Passenger Focus		1	1	-	-	-
Scottish Government (SG)***	•	172	108	190	166	24
Transport (Department for) (DfT)	•	80	42	41	37	4
Valuation Office Agency		1	1	-	-	-
Work and Pensions (Department for) (DWP)	•	362	137	43	41	2
Welsh Assembly Government (WAG)	•	100	54	258	206	52
TOTAL (GSS)		6,544	1,304	1,365	1,077	288
Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)	•	355	246	184	113	71
GRAND TOTAL		6,899	1,550	1,549	1,190	359

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Note 1: Staff Numbers exclude Field Staff in ONS and NISRA employed to collect data for social surveys

Note 2: Product numbers exclude any (as yet ,unidentified) statistics produced by the 38 Non-Crown bodies listed in either the UK Government's 'Official Statistics Order' or the Scottish Government's equivalent Order.

* ONS's 'Other Products' include 22 'Experimental Statistics' , 2 'Other Official Statistics', and 85 products described as 'National Statistics Supporting Material' (e.g. Reports issued in the 'Methodology' series)

**All numbers include professional staff affiliated to other Analytical Groups e.g. Economists, Social Researchers, etc

*** GRO(Scotland) and ISD(Scotland) product totals have been added to the figures for the 'Scottish Government'

Annex A(ii) - Other Producers of Official Statistics (who are neither Crown Bodies nor affiliated to the GSS)

1. The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 gave Ministers the option to extend the definition of official statistics to embrace, in addition, and as appropriate, any statistics produced by any of the Non-Crown Bodies which come under their jurisdiction, or are linked to their Departments in any way.
2. To date, UK Government Ministers and Scottish Government Ministers have exercised this option in only a limited way, and their decisions to date have been published by means of the following two statutory instruments:
 - *The Official Statistics Order 2008* - which listed 37 Non-Crown Bodies
 - *The Official Statistics (Scotland) Order 2008* - which listed three Non-Crown Bodies (two of which replicate those listed in the UK Government's Order)
3. However, neither of these two Orders identify which of the mass of quantitative information produced and published by the various public bodies named in each Order are deemed to be 'official statistics' in the context of the Act.
4. Cabinet Office statistical staff and their Department's legal counsel are currently drafting a third such Order which is likely to list another 30 or so additional public bodies whose 'statistics' have been deemed to come within the UK Statistics Authority's remit. This third Order will also limit itself to listing only the names of the public bodies deemed by Ministers to be producers of official statistics. As with the previous two Orders, it will not identify which of their quantitative products will be regarded as 'official statistics'.
5. Once this latest (third) Order has been presented to Parliament, and thereafter, Cabinet Office will leave it to the individual Departments concerned to draw up any further Orders, or any revisions to existing Orders.
6. The additional public bodies listed in the first two Orders described above are as follows:

The Official Statistics Order 2008

(Note: Ministers have subsequently decided that those bodies marked with an @ should be removed from the list when the Second Order is published)

- Audit Commission for Local Authorities and the NHS in England and Wales
- British Hallmarking Council @
- Certification Officer
- Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland
- Coal Authority
- Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection
- Commission for Social Care Inspection
- Commission for the New Towns
- Consumer Panel
- Design Council
- Fleet Air Arm Museum @
- Gas and Electricity Consumer Council
- Health and Social Care Information Centre*
- Health Protection Agency
- Hearing Aid Council @
- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary
- Higher Education Statistics Agency

- Housing Corporation
- Independent Police Complaints Commission
- Learning and Skills Council for England
- National Army Museum @
- National Patient Safety Agency
- National Policing Improvement Agency
- National Treatment Agency
- Natural Environment Research Council
- Northern Ireland Policing Board
- Office of Communications
- Parole Board
- Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
- Probation Board for Northern Ireland
- Royal Air Force Museum @
- Royal Marines Museum @
- Royal Naval Museum @
- Royal Navy Submarine Museum @
- Student Loans Company
- Urban Regeneration Agency
- Youth Justice Board for England and Wales

* Included in the Order because it is a Special Health Authority and therefore not a Crown Body (although it is affiliated to the GSS and therefore also included in Annex A(i))

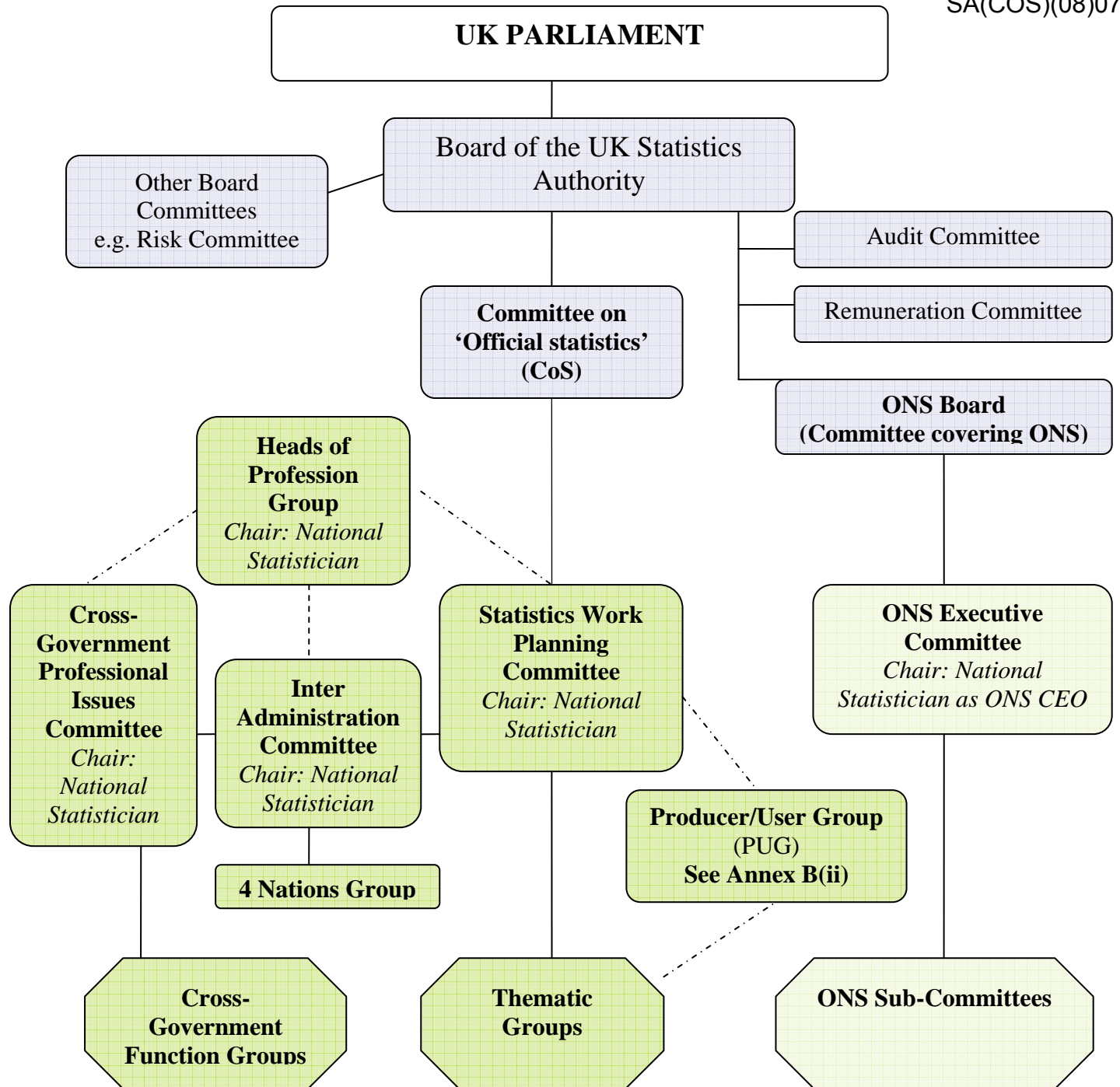
The Official Statistics (Scotland) Order 2008

- Common Services Agency for the Scottish Health Service
- Higher Education Statistics Agency**
- Student Loans Company**

** Registered in England and, therefore, listed in the UK Government's Order as well

The next UK Government Order

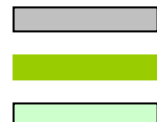
7. The Cabinet Office's proposal for a second UK Government Order (which will also revise the first Order) are contained as a separate paper on this agenda. The net effect of deletions from the first Order, and additions generated by the Second Order will be an initial expansion of the UK statistical system to include the statistics produced by a total of 63 Non-Crown Bodies.



- **GSS Human Resources Committee**
- **GSS Statistical Policy and Standards Committee** (+ Sub-Committee on Data Sharing and Confidentiality)
- **GSS Reporting, Presentation and Dissemination Committee** (+ Sub-Committee on Web Delivery)
- **GSS International Committee**
- **GSS Regional and Geography Committee**
- **GSS Methodology Advisory Committee**

LEGEND

UKSA Committees/Sub-Committees (top):
 Cross-Government Committees: (bottom left)
 ONS-only Committees (bottom right):



Annex B(i) - The Non-Government User Community

1. The main body through which the ONS, on behalf of the GSS, liaises with the non-government user community is the Statistics User Forum (SUF) which is the successor to the long-established Statistics User Council (SUC). The SUF operates as an umbrella body coordinating and channeling the views and voices of some 20 or more individual user groups. The SUF is supported by a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and is administered by the Royal Statistical Society (RSS).
2. The National Statistician and ONS Directors meet regularly with SUF Executives to discuss user needs - in what is known as the Producers and Users (PUG) meeting - and ONS sends an observer to the regular SUF meetings which involve representatives from each of its member User Groups. ONS and other GSS representatives also contribute to, and attend, the annual SUF Conference. GSS Departments and individuals also liaise more directly, as required, and as appropriate, with representatives of each of the individual user groups
3. SUF and individual User Groups views are subsequently articulated by ONS and the rest of GSS, as appropriate, in the various GSS producer committees. The following groups and organisations are represented on the Statistics User Forum

Affiliated groups

Association of Census Distributors
British Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (BURISA)
Business Statistics User Group
Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals
Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics User Group
Demographic User Group
Financial and Economic Statistics User Group
Fire and Rescue Services User Group
Gender Statistics User Group
Health Statistics User Group
International Trade Statistics User Group
Labour Market Statistics User Group
Local Authority Research and Intelligence Association (LARIA)
National Accounts User Group
Output Area Classification User Group
RSS Official Statistics Section
RSS Social Statistics Section
Society of Business Economists
Transport Statistics User Group

Co-opted groups

Market Research Society
Association of Regional Observatories
British Society for Population Studies

Observers

Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)
Office for National Statistics
Local Government Association

Annex C The Different Categories of Official Statistics

Context

1. The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 refers to two types of 'statistics' - 'official statistics' (all of which come within the UK Statistics Authority's overall 'monitoring' remit) and a subset of official statistics' called 'National Statistics' - labelled as such because they are deemed to be compliant with the Authority's Code of Practice for Statistics. Although the Act provides a definition of the word 'official', it makes no attempt to define the word 'statistics'.

'Official statistics' - produced by Crown Bodies

2. In the context of the Act, this term covers all those statistical outputs produced by (i) the Statistics Authority and its executive office - the ONS; (ii) other UK Government departments and agencies; (iii) the Scottish Administration (iv) A Welsh Ministerial Authority (v) a Northern Ireland department; and (vi) any other person acting on behalf of the Crown – all of which bodies can be described collectively as 'Crown body producers'. [Note: This definition covers a very large number of public bodies, and goes much wider, therefore, than the portfolio of statistical outputs produced by members of the Government Statistical Service (GSS).

Official Statistics - produced by Non-Crown Bodies

3. The Act also allows Ministers to specify, through secondary legislation (i.e. via an Order), which of the various non-Crown bodies which come under their jurisdiction produce 'official statistics' so that their statistical products can also be subject to monitoring by the Statistics Authority and be eligible for assessment as 'National Statistics'. This provision was designed to ensure a broad definition of 'official statistics' from the start, as well as a flexible one which can be adapted over time to suit changing circumstances.

'National Statistics'

4. The Act allows this label to be applied only to a specific subset of 'official statistics' i.e. those which are deemed to be compliant with the Statistics Authority's Code of Practice for Statistics - currently the existing National Statistics Code; but, eventually, the Statistics Authority's own Code. In practice, and for some time to come, the label will comprise three basic types:
 - **Legacy 'National Statistics'** - any statistical products which obtained their designation as 'National Statistics' before April 2008 in accordance with the arrangements set out in the *Framework for National Statistics* (2000) and which have retained their status, but which have not yet been formally re-assessed by the Authority for compliance with its Code of Practice;
 - **Re-assessed 'National Statistics'** - any statistical products which have had their retained 'NS' status confirmed by the Authority after a formal re-assessment of compliance;
 - **New 'National Statistics'** - any statistical products which have been nominated by Ministers (or by the National Statistician in the case of ONS) as first-time candidates for 'National Statistics' status; which have been subject to their first formal assessment by the Authority; which have been subsequently certified by the Authority as compliant with its Code of Practice for Statistics; and which, as a result, have been granted 'NS' accreditation by the Authority.

The UK Statistics Authority's remit and its Code of Practice

5. The Authority's overall duty to monitor and report on the production and publication

of official statistics means that its remit extends across all official statistics wherever produced, and regardless of whether they are produced by Crown Bodies, or by those Non-Crown Bodies which have designated as producers of official statistics by Order.

6. The standards of best practice set out in the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice (which will also encompass the principles and rules governing pre-release access set out in the Pre-Release Access Order 2008) will apply to all official statistics. However, only existing National Statistics, or statistics nominated for such status, will be formally assessed for compliance with the Authority's Code.

A Note on 'Experimental Statistics'

7. This is a label created and used originally by the ONS, but which has now been adopted by some other Government Departments. The label applies to a particular category of official statistics which fit the definition given in the existing *Protocol on Presentation, Dissemination and Pricing*. It refers, basically, to statistics which are being consciously 'groomed' for NS status when, and if, circumstances permit.
8. Those 'Experimental statistics' which had not become 'Legacy National Statistics' by 1 April have become, in the context of the Act, 'other official statistics' (albeit with the 'Experimental' label). In the fullness of time, they will have to join the queue of candidates for a formal assessment of compliance.
9. Although the concept of 'Experimental statistics' receives no mention in the Act, this label will retain its legitimacy simply by dint of the fact that the proposed new Code Of Practice encourages producers of official statistics to continue using this concept.

Different Categories of Official Statistics

10. The foregoing means that, in practical (but not legal) terms, the term 'official statistics' will embrace four distinct categories of statistics produced by public bodies:
 - 'National Statistics' - which are certified as Code-compliant (see above) and which can, therefore, bear the NS Kitemark
 - GSS-managed statistics that are not 'National Statistics' - a subset of which may be labelled by the GSS as 'Experimental'. [Note: This is the category to which the GSS Logo would previously have applied]
 - Other official statistics produced by Crown Bodies but not under the professional management of the GSS [Note: The Home Office informed Parliament last year that an internal audit had revealed that only 12% of the Home Office's 'official' statistics were produced under the auspices of the GSS]
 - Statistics produced by non-Crown Bodies, and listed by Ministers in secondary legislation (i.e. an Order) [Note: Those HoPs with an interest in, and most affected by, such Ministerial decisions are unlikely, at this early stage, to know what sort of 'statistics' these non-Crown bodies produce, nor how they are produced]
11. Notwithstanding the above, this will leave a large residue of 'numbers' produced by public bodies which will not be defined as 'official statistics' and which will not, therefore, come within the remit of the Authority.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY
COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS
A Second Official Statistics Order

SA(COS)(08)08

Introduction

1. This paper presents a submission from the Cabinet Office to the UK Statistics Authority concerning a second Official Statistics Order. This Order specifies which non-Crown bodies may produce Official Statistics under the terms of the Statistics Act.
2. The submission represents an informal consultation with the Authority, prior to the formal consultation with the Authority which the Government is obliged to conduct.

Timing

3. Cabinet Office hope to lay the Order before Parliament this autumn, possibly as soon as the end of October

Recommendation

4. The Committee is invited to comment on the submission.

Secretariat, October 2008

List of Annexes

- Annex 1 Cabinet Office Submission - Informal Consultation on the Second Official Statistics Order**
- Annex 1a List of Bodies to be Included by the Second Order**
- Annex 1b List of Bodies to be Removed by the Second Order**
- Annex 1c Full List of non-Crown Bodies who may produce Official Statistics following passage of the Second Order**

Annex 1 Cabinet Office Submission

The scope of official statistics – the second Official Statistics order

1. We have been working over the summer on producing a new Official Statistics order to include all bodies that should come under UK Statistic Authority's remit as producers of official statistics. We want to share with you the results of our work so far to give you a chance to comment, in advance of our drafting the order. This is not the formal consultation that is required by the Statistics and Registration Service Act – rather, **a less formal consultation** that will hopefully allow the formal one to occur quickly and smoothly.

Background

2. The Statistics and Registration Service Act (section 6) allows Ministers to specify statistics that are not produced by Crown bodies or Office for National Statistics (ONS) to be counted as official statistics. This is to be done by making an (affirmative) order. In early 2008, in advance of the Act coming into force, the Cabinet Office produced The Official Statistics Order 2008, which came into force on 1 April 2008.
3. The original intention of Cabinet Office officials when working on this order was to provide a comprehensive list of bodies to come under UK Statistics Authority's remit. When the trawl was started in December 2007 it quickly became apparent that it would take too long to examine all possible bodies in time to get a comprehensive order ready to come into force on 1 April 2008. If this deadline had been missed then all current National Statistics that weren't automatically official statistics (by virtue of being produced by Crown bodies or ONS) would have lost their National Statistics status, because all National Statistics would have to be official statistics from 1 April.
4. So the priority in creating the first order quickly became to ensure that all National Statistics were covered. The final result was a list which included a mixture of bodies: some producers of National Statistics, some bodies (such as the Gas and Electricity Consumer Council) that should be considered producers of official statistics (even if not National Statistics) and which were included because their sponsoring department was able to provide a comprehensive list promptly and some small bodies (such as the Royal Naval Museum) which we have since decided are best not to include as official statistics producers for now (see below).
5. The list was criticised in Parliament (for example, Lord de Mauley observed "a haphazardness about the process of selection"), although the order was passed. We have tried to follow a **more consistent process this time round**, and without the pressure of the 1 April deadline looming so large we have been able to give departments time to make enquiries and to make enquiries ourselves.

The process for compiling the list

6. We wrote to HoPs in May 2008 asking them to consider each separate body under their department's responsibility, and to decide whether it ought to be included in an order as a producer of official statistics. In deciding whether to include a particular body within the order, the test was whether it produces any 'significant national-level statistics' that:
 - inform the public about the social and economic position of the country;

- are likely to be used to judge government performance and targets; **or**
 - are likely to attract sufficient media attention that the government would regard it as important that the public has trust in them.
7. We wanted to exclude bodies which only produce statistics about themselves, for example visitor numbers, or financial accounts (we have financial audit for that); or only at local or regional level. The latter is a pragmatic exclusion for the present and we may return to sub-national statistical producers later.
 8. The onus was to justify why a body is excluded, not why it should be included. Reasons for exclusion could be: that it has no material statistics, that there are other suitable arrangements for securing trust, or that scrutiny by UK Statistics Authority is not appropriate for some other (eg legal) reason. But we should not accept reasons for exclusion such as: it would be too much of a burden or too costly or that “we are independent”. Bodies may not opt out of financial reporting standards, freedom of information requirement, or data protection laws, so they should not be able to opt out of a regime to improve quality and trust in statistics.
 9. It would be simpler and more defensible to include a body for all the statistics it produces (even though the Act allows coverage of only certain statistics, we would expect that to be exceptional).
 10. We only needed to cover the ultimate producers of national-level official statistics. There is no need to include suppliers (eg it was not necessary to include each police force in order for UK Statistics Authority to investigate the quality of crime statistics). We have not included bodies whose coverage extends only to Scotland, only to Wales or only to Northern Ireland (except for reserved matters in Northern Ireland).
 11. As a starting point we asked HoPs to work from schedule 1 to the Freedom of Information Act as a list of bodies to consider for inclusion. HoPs were also encouraged to use any other lists they might have of bodies that their departments are responsible for. After the first round of replies were received, we also looked at other lists, such as the Cabinet Office publication *Public Bodies*, which lists non-departmental public bodies by sponsoring department and type (executive, tribunal, advisory etc), and the National Accounts classifications spreadsheet (available from the ONS website). We also circulated the first round responses after we had collated them to all HoPs, to help ensure consistency of approach.
 12. Chief Statisticians in the devolved administrations were copied into emails to HoPs, so ought to be aware of the principles being followed.
 13. Appendices to this letter provide the lists of bodies that are to be added to the original order and removed from the first order.
 14. Two bodies are worth mentioning specifically. The **BBC** has not been included, but it is now in charge of one particular statistical product, the TV Licence Evasion Model. This model, estimating the rate of evasion by various breakdowns, was previously maintained by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). DCMS would normally receive an annual update from the BBC on any changes to the model (for approval), while the NAO also currently include an assessment of the model in their annual audit of DCMS. The Royal Statistics Society (RSS) also wrote a report on the model (giving it

a clean bill of health) a few years ago. The **CAA** (Civil Aviation Authority) has not been recommended for inclusion by Department for Transport (DfT) because most of its statistics are produced on a commercial basis, are not available free of charge, the body receives very little public money etc. But there are some series which it produces for the government to pass on to international bodies. In both these cases we think it would be more appropriate to include the specific statistics in an order, rather than the whole body – but in this case it might be better to ask the sponsoring departments (DCMS and DfT) to write the orders. The chief statistician at the CAA seems happy with this approach in principle.

Next steps

15. We will welcome any comments you have about the list and the process followed. We hope that by showing you this now, the formal consultation will be quick. As soon as the formal consultation is done, we can put the draft order through the Joint Council for Statutory Instruments and then print and lay it in Parliament.

Please note that this list is provisional, in that there are a few outstanding queries that we are awaiting responses for. We also may have changes after our lawyers have looked over this. But we do not expect substantial changes (and it is particularly unlikely that the list will be added to).

Our lawyers have suggested that rather than producing a second order, we achieve the same effect by amending the first order. This allows us to delete those bodies from the first order that we want to, and keeps us to one list to refer to instead of two.

Cabinet Office, September, 2008

Annex 1a List of bodies to be included by the second order

Arts Council of England
Board of the Pension Protection Fund
British Tourist Authority (aka Visit Britain)
British Transport Police Authority
Citizens Advice
Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment
Commission for Integrated Transport
Competition Commission
Countryside Agency
English Sports Council (aka Sport England)
Environment Agency
Financial Services Authority
Gambling Commission
Higher Education Funding Council for England
Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (aka English Heritage)
Joint Nature Conservation Committee
Judicial Appointments Commission
Legal Services Commission
Low Pay Commission
National Consumer Council
National Housing and Planning Advice Unit
National Lottery Commission
Natural England
Nuclear Decommissioning Authority
Pensions Regulator
Prisons and Probation Ombudsman for England and Wales
Rail Passengers Council (aka Passenger Focus)
School Food Trust
Sustainable Development Commission
The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries
Training and Development Agency for Schools
UK Film Council
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority
Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

Annex 1b List of bodies to be removed by the second order

British Hallmarking Council
Fleet Air Arm Museum
Hearing Aid Council
National Army Museum
Royal Air Force Museum
Royal Marines Museum
Royal Naval Museum
Royal Navy Submarine Museum

Annex 1c Full list of bodies that will be included following passage of the second order

Arts Council of England
Audit Commission for Local Authorities and the National Health Service in England and Wales
Board of the Pension Protection Fund
British Tourist Authority (aka Visit Britain)
British Transport Police Authority
Certification Officer
Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland
Citizens Advice
Coal Authority
Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment
Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection
Commission for Integrated Transport
Commission for Social Care Inspection
Commission for the New Towns
Competition Commission
Consumer Panel established under section 16 of the Communications Act 2003
Countryside Agency
Design Council
English Sports Council (aka Sport England)
Environment Agency
Financial Services Authority
Gambling Commission
Gas and Electricity Consumer Council
Health and Social Care Information Centre
Health Protection Agency
Her Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary
Higher Education Funding Council for England
Higher Education Statistics Agency
Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (aka English Heritage)
Housing Corporation
Independent Police Complaints Commission
Joint Nature Conservation Committee
Judicial Appointments Commission
Learning and Skills Council for England
Legal Services Commission
Low Pay Commission
National Consumer Council
National Housing and Planning Advice Unit
National Lottery Commission
National Patient Safety Agency
National Policing Improvement Agency
National Treatment Agency
Natural England
Natural Environment Research Council
Northern Ireland Policing Board
Nuclear Decommissioning Authority
Office of Communications
Parole Board
Pensions Regulator
Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland

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Prisons and Probation Ombudsman for England and Wales
Probation Board for Northern Ireland
Rail Passengers Council (aka Passenger Focus)
School Food Trust
Student Loans Company
Sustainable Development Commission
The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries
Training and Development Agency for Schools
UK Film Council
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority
Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
Urban Regeneration Agency
Youth Justice Board for England and Wales

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

SA(COS)(08)09

A New System for Statistical Planning

Purpose

1. This paper provides an overview of the National Statistician's proposed new planning arrangements for the UK statistical service.

Timing

2. These proposals will be discussed at the Statistics Heads of Profession (HoPs) meeting on 3 November. It is hoped that HoPs will be able to sign-off these proposals and the new arrangements will be implemented in early 2009.

Recommendations

3. This paper is presented primarily for information, although the Committee may wish to satisfy itself that the arrangements set out in this paper align with the proposals being developed by the UK Statistics Authority with regard to planning.

Discussion

4. The Statistics Act and the statutory Code of Practice for Statistics provide an opportunity to re-examine the planning processes used across the statistical service. Under the former National Statistics arrangements, planning processes had a number of weaknesses (see Annex A for details). As a result, statistical planning has tended to take place at a departmental level, with departments working in relative isolation. Despite the best intentions of the Government Statistical Service (GSS), no real attempt was made to ensure that individual departmental plans fitted together into a coherent overall work programme, nor was action taken to address known gaps.
5. To be effective, planning needs to take place at a number of levels within the statistical system and an optimal planning system will seamlessly integrate both 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches to planning and bring together the plans developed in each of the four countries into a coherent UK plan. Such an approach will mean that all users are listened to and will result in a clear roadmap for the future development of the statistical system. Achieving this ideal will require a change in culture across the GSS and the adoption of a more corporate approach.
6. There are a number of key principles which will need to be adopted to ensure planning is effective:
 - **Planning will be a continual process.** The statistical service must be more responsive, planning will be an iterative process which is driven by, but not tied to, the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR);
 - **The planning process will respect actual lines of authority.** The UK statistical service is comprised of a number of autonomous bodies and the planning process must recognise this, but also demand that they do not plan in isolation.
 - **Part of planning must be a consideration of what isn't being produced.** This must be part of the regular planning process at all levels. Planning must also consider the scope for integrating outputs.
7. The Authority recently published a consultation document which sets out draft proposals for a statutory Code of Practice for Statistics. Any new proposals about statistical planning will obviously need to be consistent with this code (see Annex B

for more details). It is already clear from these draft proposals that the Authority expects statistical producers to act in a more joined-up fashion and plan in a more systematic way than has happened to date.

8. Our proposal is to establish a planning system that operates at three levels, and which recognises the requirement for different sorts of interaction between producers and users. The key outputs of this process will be:
 - **UK Statistics Authority Plan.** This will be a high-level strategic document which outlines the key issues which the UK Statistics Authority intends to address.
 - **National Statistician's Statistics Plan.** This will set out a corporate view of how the UK statistical service intends to meet the challenges posed by the Authority, and also reflect the needs of users which have been identified by departmental plans.
 - **Producer Plans:** Each department/administration will be required to prepare their own statistics plan, based on engagement with their users. These low-level plans will be the essential building blocks of the planning process and all other plans will build on these.
9. The new committee system has been designed to facilitate an easy information flow in both directions - going from the Authority downwards but also upwards from statistical producers. Annex C contains a diagrammatic representation of the structure and more detailed descriptions of the following three committees.
10. *UK Statistics Work Planning Committee.* This will be the lynchpin of the system and it plays a key role in bringing together the top-down and bottom-up influences. It will be chaired by the National Statistician and those HoPs with large numbers of GSS staff will also be amongst its membership. Its main output will be the National Statistician's Statistics Plan.
11. *Planning Groups (PGs).* These will support the UK Statistics Work Planning Committee and will align with the Themes set out in the new National Statistics Taxonomy. They will bring together the key players within a statistical sector and be given specific objectives of identifying the gaps in the statistical base, determining known areas of weakness, making proposals for how these could be addressed and identifying any steps which could be taken to make statistics within their sector more comparable. PGs will also be expected to develop detailed costings for all existing commitments and any new projects which are required to meet the objectives set by the Authority, especially for those projects which span more than one department.
12. *Inter-Administration Committee.* This will have a particular role to deliver an inter-administration plan. A key aspect of the work of this committee will be to examine the scope for improving the comparability of the datasets produced by each administration and ensuring that the UK Statistical System continues to meet its international obligations. The key aspects of the inter-administration plan will be reproduced in the National Statistician's Statistics Plan.

Matt Prior, National Statistics and International Division (ONS), October 2008

List of Annexes:

- Annex A Weaknesses of the National Statistics Planning Process**
- Annex B Extracts from the draft Code of Practice for Statistics**
- Annex C Further Detail on the Roles of the Proposed Committees**

Annex A Weaknesses of the National Statistics Planning Process

1. The *Framework for National Statistics* gave the National Statistician the responsibility for establishing the planning framework for National Statistics and also establishing an appropriate committee structure for delivering planning functions. The National Statistician was also required by the Framework to produce a coherent high-level programme for National Statistics which reflected the needs of users and brought together the key elements of the statistical work programmes across government and present this programme to the Statistics Commission..
2. The National Statistician's response to this requirement was to set up 12 National Statistics Theme Working Groups. These Theme Working Groups were a small but essential part, of the National Statistics governance arrangements, they had a clear remit and a clear reporting line to the National Statistician via the National Statistics Planning Board.
3. The Terms of Reference for Theme Working Group were to:
 - contribute to National Statistics Work Programme;
 - report on progress against Work Programme in National Statistics Annual Report;
 - identify those areas which warranted a National Statistics Quality Review and determine the most appropriate timescale for the reviews to take place;
 - carry out regular consultation with users to inform the Work Programme;
 - consider and report on periodic 'challenge' issues submitted to it by the National Statistician and or the National Statistics Planning Board.
4. These planning processes had a number of weaknesses, namely the:
 - non-statutory status of the *Framework for National Statistics*;
 - absence of a body to provide strategic direction/challenge role for Theme Working Groups once the National Statistics Planning Committee was disbanded in 2003;
 - difficulty in marrying the different processes of the UK Government and Devolved Administrations;
 - variable levels of user engagement across Themes;
 - Theme Working Groups having responsibility but no authority – particularly to influence departmental/administration spending;
5. As a result, statistical planning tended to take place at a departmental level, with each department working in relative isolation. Despite the best intentions of the Government Statistical Service (GSS), no real attempt was made to ensure that individual departmental plans fitted together into a coherent overall work programme and nor was action was taken to address known gaps. A National Statistics Work Programme was published at regular intervals but it tended to be an aggregation of existing departmental plans with no real value added.
6. Although the 12 Theme Working Groups have continued to meet regularly, they have been used more as fora to exchange information rather than carrying out a planning role. This has meant that they have lacked the ability to act in a co-ordinated way and scan the horizon effectively. So that when a problem arose with the quality of migration statistics a couple of years ago, a bespoke taskforce was set up to take the issue forward, rather than making use the Population and Migration Theme Working Group as might be expected when the Theme Working Groups were originally set up.

Annex B Extracts from the Draft Code of Practice for Statistics

Principle 2 of the draft Code states:

'The planning, production and dissemination of official statistics should be managed so as to meet the requirements of informed decision making by government, public services, business and the wider community. As far as possible, official statistics should be internally consistent, consistent over time and comparable between producers.'

It goes on to list the practices which producers should follow

- *Under the guidance of the UK Statistics Authority adopt systematic statistical planning arrangements including transparent priority setting that reflect the obligation to serve the public good.*
- *Report annually to the UK Statistics Authority on progress against statistical plans.*

In addition to this, Principle 4 of the draft code states that producers should:

'Make full use of shared statistical planning arrangements with other producers of official statistics both to minimise the risk of duplication in statistical production and to make it possible to use existing sources, in combination where appropriate, to meet user needs'.

Annex C - Further Detail on the Roles of the Proposed Committees

UK Statistics Work Planning Committee

1. This committee will be the lynchpin of the system and play a key role in bringing together the top-down and bottom-up influences. It will be chaired by the National Statistician. Its main output will be the National Statistician's Statistics plan.
2. Although it has no formal authority over departmental or devolved administration planning, its position will allow it to take an across the board view. It will ensure that work is progressing to meet the strategic objectives/challenges identified by the Authority (or seek reasons why not). It will also seek evidence that cross-cutting opportunities are being identified and that there are plans in place to address known gaps.
3. A key role for this committee will be to commission detailed costings and project timetables for any statistical developments which will be required to meet the objectives of the Authority. These costings could then be used as the basis for bids in future spending rounds but could also be used as levers by the Authority to encourage Departments to allocate more of their budgets to statistics.
4. This committee will also act as conduit for producers to feedback concerns to the Authority. This committee will be able to elevate any issues emerging from across the producer plans to the UK Statistics Authority to consider. It will also be able to remit issues which relate to devolved statistics to the Inter-Administration Committee for consideration and resolution.

Planning Groups (PGs)

5. These will be another key element of the planning process and will provide substantial support to the UK Statistics Work Planning Committee. They will bring together the key players within a statistical sector and be given specific objectives of identifying the gaps in the statistical base, determining known areas of weakness and making proposals for how these could be addressed and identifying any steps which could be taken to make statistics within their sector more comparable. These groups will draw on producer plans and the personal expertise of its members who will be seen as the experts in their field. Bringing these people into a group will inevitably generate dialogue and expose issues which need to be addressed.
6. The PGs will also be expected to develop detailed costings for all existing statistical commitments, in order for the Authority to get an understanding of the cost of statistical production within each sector and also to cost any new projects which are required to meet the objectives set by the Authority, especially for those projects which span more than one department.
7. It is also anticipated that producers/departments may want to consult with the relevant PG(s) before making any substantial changes to statistics. Such a consultation, would allow producers to get a much clearer idea of the impact of any proposed changes before they are made and allow users to influence the proposals before they are implemented. If concerns remained about plans then the PGs could raise these formally with the UK Statistics Work Planning Committee and ask the Authority for their view and this may lead to reprioritisation as a result.

Inter-Administration Committee

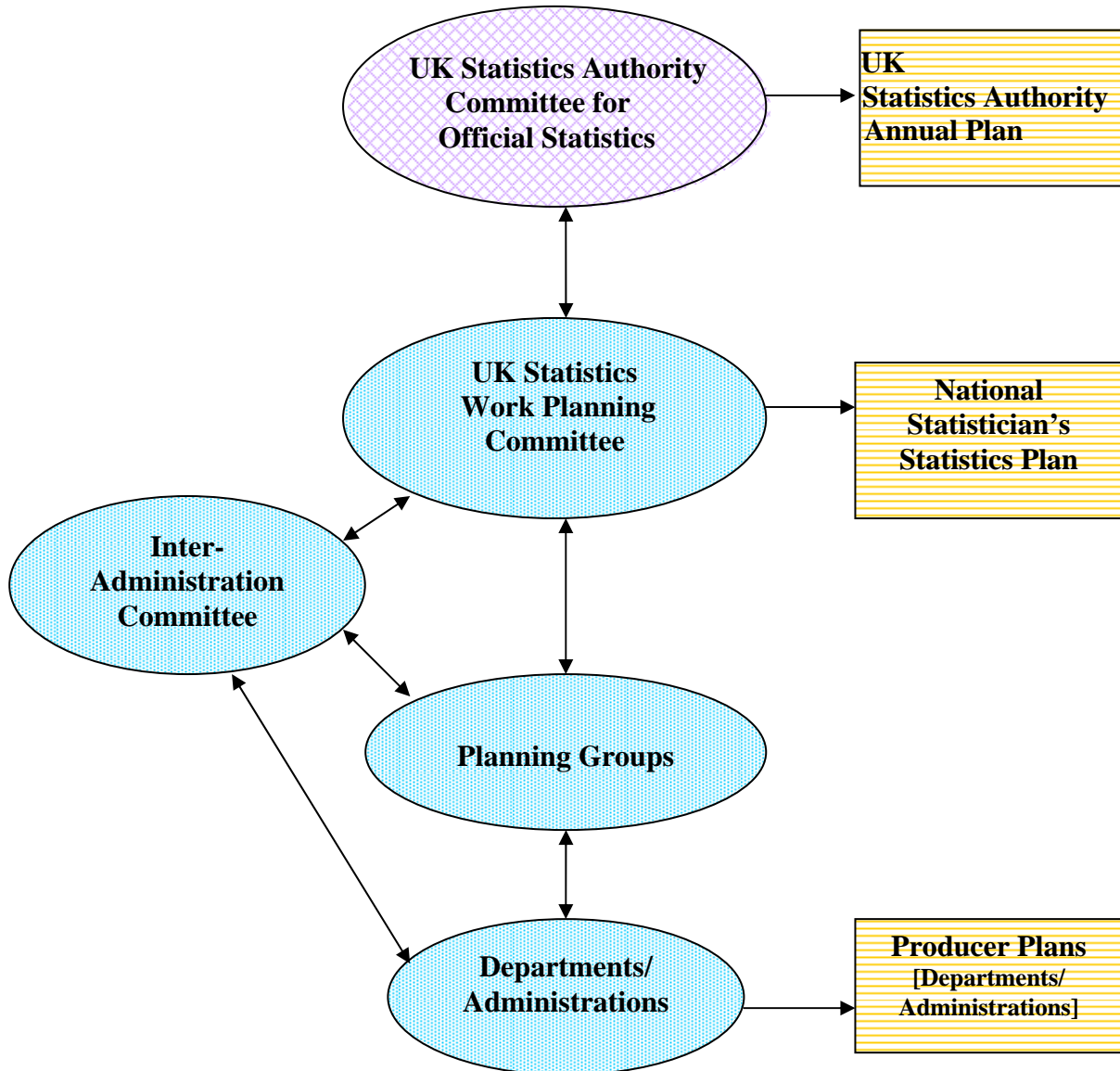
8. This will have a particular role to deliver an inter-administration plan. A key aspect of the work of this committee will be to examine the scope for improving the comparability of the datasets produced by each administration and ensuring that the

UK Statistical System continues to meet its international obligations. The key aspects of the inter-administration plan will be reproduced in the National Statistician's Statistics Plan.

UK Statistics Authority Committee for Official Statistics

9. This committee will provide some influence over statistical planning conducted by the UK Statistics System although it has no power to exert any authority. It may well follow-up on issues identified by the Authority with the UK Statistical System and seek evidence that issues that they are being addressed, as are user needs more widely. It will be the route by which statistical producers can interact with the Authority and it will have a role to consider any issues identified and elevated from producer plans.

Diagram 1: Proposed Planning Process



UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY
COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

SA(COS)(08)10

Identifying Official Statistics

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to share with the UK Statistics Authority the guidelines which have been drawn up for Government Departments to help them:
 - identify which of the mass of quantitative information produced by public bodies outside the Government Statistical Service (GSS) domain should be treated as 'official statistics' for the purposes of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007, and any of its supporting legislation (Annex A);
 - advise non-GSS officials responsible for non-designated statistics about the degree to which they will be expected to adhere to the standards set out in the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice, at least initially – given that, for many of them, this will be first time that they have ever encountered a Code of (statistical) Practice (Annex B).

Timing

2. The paper is presented for information.

Recommendations

3. The Committee for Official Statistics are invited to comment on these guidelines

Discussion

4. The contents of this paper are still subject to peer review by members of the Cabinet Office Working Group (CO-WG). This group was tasked to provide guidance to GSS Heads of Profession on the implications and ramifications of the provisions within the Statistics Act which give Ministers the option to extend the boundaries of official statistics to cover both: 'statistics' produced by Crown bodies but outside the management of GSS professionals; and 'statistics' produced by Non-Crown Bodies. This Committee will be advised if the CO-WG make any substantial changes to the Annexes attached to this document.

James Denman, National Statistics and International Division (ONS), October 2008

List of Annexes

Annex A Guidelines for Identifying 'Official Statistics'

Annex B The Code-compliance of non-designated Official Statistics

Annex A Guidelines for identifying 'Official Statistics'

Background

1. Under the provisions of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007, the UK Statistics Authority's monitoring remit covers all 'official statistics'. The Act defines 'official' as covering not only those statistics produced within the Government Statistical Service but also all other 'statistics' produced by Crown Bodies. The Act also gives Ministers the option to extend the range of 'official statistics' to embrace, in addition, any of the statistics produced by any of the non-Crown Bodies which come under their jurisdiction or are linked to their Department. The Act does not, however, define what is meant by the word 'statistics'.

Purpose of these Guidelines

2. These guidelines attempt to provide a workable set of criteria for defining 'statistics' which can then be applied in the context of either the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007, the Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008, and all existing, and any future, Official Statistics Orders. The purpose of these criteria is to help Heads of Profession and other responsible persons determine which of the mass of quantitative information produced and handled by officials working in public bodies outside the government's analytical community should be treated as official statistics and should, therefore, come under the UK Statistics Authority's scrutiny.

Context

3. The government analytical community comprises not only the Government Statistical Service (GSS - all of whose quantitative outputs are automatically defined as statistics), but also three other services - the Government Economic Service (GES), the Government Operational Research Service (GORS), and the Government Social Research (GSR) service, only some of whose quantitative outputs are likely to be defined as 'statistics'. It is proposed that the Statistics Authority should determine for itself how it will deal with the outputs of the GES, the GSR service and GORS, and whether any of them should be treated as official statistics, using these guidelines where appropriate. This paper has no more to say on this particular issue.

Definitions

4. By definition, a statistic is quantitative information that has been subjected to some form of analysis, beyond the mere numerical value of the information itself. The EU definition is "quantitative and qualitative, aggregated and representative information characterising a collective population in a considered population". However, neither of these definitions is particularly useful in the context under discussion.

Summary

5. It is proposed that judgements as to whether information produced by public bodies can be labelled as official statistics should be made by reference to the following criteria, each of which is explained in more detail below:
 - **Provenance** i.e. the source of the quantitative information in question;
 - **Content/Purpose** i.e. the subject-matter of that information, and the uses to which that information is put;
 - **Dissemination** i.e. the extent to which the information in question is disseminated beyond those who own or handle that information;
 - **Coverage** i.e. the spatial coverage of that quantitative information.
6. These criteria will enable Heads of Profession and other responsible persons to focus their attention on valid statistical outputs, and avoid the possibility of the UK Statistics

Authority wasting its resources on the investigation of outputs which later turn out to fall outside commonly agreed notions of what constitutes 'official statistics'.

7. Heads of Profession will wish to ensure that they and their departments consider any presentational issues arising from the application of these criteria, where the distinction between official statistics and other quantitative information might confuse the public or other commentators.
8. It is also proposed that no immediate value-judgements should be made about the information being assessed. Such judgements should come later in the process.

The Proposed Criteria

9. In order for any quantitative information produced by public bodies to qualify as statistics for the purposes of the Act, the following criteria should be met:

1. Provenance

In order to qualify:

- (a) the quantitative information in question should originate from some sort of systematic data collection system, i.e. an identifiable source of raw data such as an administrative, management, recording or registration system, or an identifiable census, survey or 'count' of some sort;
- (b) the collection process should be conducted on either a regular or recurring basis, or be repeatable/replicable in some way.

The rationale for this criterion is to allow for the exclusion of quantitative information of vague or doubtful provenance; for which there is no readily identifiable data source e.g. quantitative information garnered in an unsystematic fashion, or based on unsubstantiated opinion, etc; or one-off/ad-hoc. Application of this criterion would mean that quantitative analyses or statements derived from properly-run Opinion Polls might qualify, but quantitative analyses or statements derived from Focus Groups might not.

2. Content/Purpose

The quantitative information in question should also fall into one or more of the following categories:

- the information is, or can be, used to monitor or measure the Government's performance or delivery (either generally, or against formal targets);
- it has the potential to impinge substantially on the formulation, implementation, evaluation, or monitoring of government policy;
- it can assist in the management of services for which the Government is responsible;
- it has the potential to inform decisions about the allocation of government resources;
- it provides a window on the work of government by, for example, allowing citizens to assess the impact of public policies and actions;
- it can encourage and inform debate on issues which are already in the public domain;
- it is likely, on either an occasional or regular basis, to generate media attention and therefore excite public interest;

- it can serve the 'public good' by meeting the various information needs of business, academia and the wider community.

3. Dissemination

There should be either the intention, or the obvious potential (e.g. under Freedom of Information rules), for the quantitative information in question to enter the public domain at some stage in its life-cycle, in whatever guise: for example as a Press Release, a Statistical Bulletin, any other type of hardcopy publication, a Compendium volume, a Database, a Journal Article, a Report, a Parliamentary Question Reply, a Conference Paper, a Speech, a Computer Print-Out, a Spreadsheet, an e-mail, etc.

4. Coverage

The spatial coverage of the quantitative information in question should also cover either:

(i) any one, or more, of the following geographical or national territories:

- Northern Ireland
- Wales
- Scotland
- England

(ii) any compilation or aggregation which can be deemed to be 'nationally' complete in the sense that it includes information relating to every one of the entities that it might reasonably be expected to embrace. This would allow for the inclusion of quantitative outputs such as the Department for Transport's statistics covering 'key urban areas', or an individual airport such as Heathrow.

This means that statistics (as defined above) produced by one or more sub-national public bodies (such as Local or Health Authorities) which cover only their own domain, and which cannot be aggregated to cover one or more of the four territories listed above, or which do not give a national picture should not be treated as statistics for the purposes of the Act.

Exclusion (i) – certain Financial Information

There is one set of quantitative information produced by public bodies which will meet all of the above criteria but which, it is suggested, should not be labelled as 'official statistics' for the purposes of the Act – namely financial data produced in accordance with separate and recognised accounting and auditing rules. This exception should apply across the board except in cases where financial information is routinely incorporated in statistical releases (e.g. public revenue and expenditure statistics, or local government (including health or other authority) financial statistics).

Exclusion (ii) – Forecasts

Numerate forecasts i.e. judgements about the likely future direction of a number or set of numbers (as opposed to properly calculated statistical projections) should also be excluded from the concept of official statistics. This is because forecasts, although based on official statistics, tend to be more than pure projections and also tend to involve political or non-statistical judgements.

Annex B The Code-compliance of non-designated Official Statistics

Introduction

1. Producers of official statistics which are not designated as 'National Statistics' because they have not been assessed against the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice (which also encompasses the principles and rules set out in the *Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008*) are, nevertheless, expected to follow the best practice principles set out in both documents. Although the Act does not give the Authority the power to formally assess the extent to which non-designated official statistics comply with its Code, it is very likely that the Authority will want to comment on statistics producers' overall commitment to the principles and practice of code-compliance.
2. Producers will obviously differ in the extent, and the degree, to which their non-designated statistics comply with the standards of best practice laid down by the Statistics Authority. Nevertheless, they should do their utmost to ensure that their non-designated statistics comply with the spirit if not the letter of the Authority's Code.
3. This paper provides guidance for non-Government Statistical Service (GSS) producers of non-designated official statistics on what constitutes an acceptable level of compliance with each of the Authority's ten key principles. In each case a distinction is drawn between those areas where organisations would be expected to demonstrate a high level of commitment to the Authority's Code, and those areas where it may be possible, in practice, to countenance a lower level of compliance.
4. The underlying presumption is that, over the long term, the compliance of non-designated official statistics will incrementally improve – perhaps to the extent that they can eventually be elevated to 'National Statistics' status.

Principle 1 - Integrity

Producers should be able to demonstrate a strong level of commitment to the principles set out in the Authority's *Protocol 1 on Release Practices* and have in place procedures which ensure the independence of the statistical process; the separation of statistical from political comment; and the professional and personal integrity of statistical producers.

However, it may be less easy for producers, at least in the short-term, to comply with the requirement to assess user satisfaction and to document user feedback and user complaints.

Principle 2 - Relevance

Every effort should be made, where practicable, to compile official statistics in accordance with international standards, concepts, definitions and classifications; to adopt common frames, questions, definitions, etc; and to maintain the continuity of statistical series.

However, organisations may be less well-placed when it comes to having a systematic statistical planning process; engaging in user consultation to inform such planning arrangements; and reporting progress against such plans.

Principle 3 – Sound methodology and assured quality

Organisations should, as a matter of course, comply with government-wide requirements covering records management and data security.

The methodological basis of their statistics, however, and their quality-assurance procedures may not be able match the standards that apply to designated National Statistics outputs.

Principle 4 - Value for Money

Organisations should have robust procedures in place to ensure the effective stewardship of their statistical resources, so that they serve the public good.

However, they may be less able to demonstrate that their statistical activities are fully integrated with those of other statistical producers.

Principle 5 – Communication

The standards which organisations apply to the publication, documentation, and dissemination of their official statistics should be similar to, if not the same as, those they apply to their National Statistics. All organisations should also be able to demonstrate their compliance with the Authority's *Protocol 2 on Consultation*.

The practice of publishing 'Experimental Statistics', however, may be confined to larger organisations because only the latter are likely to have the resources required to properly manage the development of these types of statistics.

Principle 6 – Presenting Statistics

It should be possible for all official statistics to comply with most, if not all, of the practices listed under this Principle, unless the producing organisation's options are limited by resource or technological constraints.

Principle 7 – Accessibility

It should be possible for producers to ensure that the accessibility of their official statistics matches the accessibility of their National Statistics, unless resource or technical constraints determine otherwise.

Principle 8 – Confidentiality

Given the requirements of the Data Protection Act, and accompanying management guidance issued to the public sector covering 'Information Security', the practices applied to official statistics should bear close comparison with the practices applied to National Statistics.

Principle 9 – Proportionate Burden

Given the Government's initiatives on 'Better Regulation', its exhortations to reduce the impact of bureaucracy, and successive Prime Ministers' long-standing and ongoing requirement that government statisticians should endeavour to limit the survey burden placed on data providers, this principle should hold equally strongly for official statistics as for National Statistics.

Some organisations, however, may not have the know-how or resources to be able to provide detailed documentation on their efforts to limit the form-filling burden, or undertake cost-benefit analyses of their data-collection activities.

Principle 10 – Adequate resources

Producers of official statistics, especially those not affiliated to the Government Statistical Service, may not be able to match the level of human and financial resources which are, typically, applied to the production of National Statistics. As a consequence, their compliance with this principle may only be partial.

They should, however, make every effort to ensure that the staff engaged in the

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production of such statistics have sufficient technical competence and are given adequate opportunities to either improve their existing statistical skills, or gain new statistical skills.